Sulfur 22

FEATURING: A TRIBUTE TO ANA MENDIETA

with contributions by John Perreault, Raquel (Kaki) Mendieta, Nereyda Garcia-Ferraz, Kate Horsfield, Linda Montano, Hans Breder, Lucy R. Lippard, Robert Rodale, Eduardo Costa, Lowery Stokes Sims, Marsha Pels, Al Nodal, Howardena Pindell, Raquel Mendieta Harrington, Nancy Spero, Mira Schor, Carolee Schneemann, Clayton Eshleman, and B. Ruby Rich.

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Sulfur

SPRING 1988

A LITERARY TRI-QUARTERLY OF THE WHOLE ART

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C O N T

4 **ROBERT DUNCAN (1919-1988):** I know myself to be mortal. . .

5 **CORAL BRACHO:** On the Facets: The Flashing *[Tr. from the Spanish by Thomas Hoeksema]*

9 **SUSAN HOWE:** "on a [*p* < suddenly. . ."

17 **MAURICE BLANCHOT:** Dreaming, Writing *[Tr. from the French by Richard Sieburth]*

25 **AMIRI BARAKA:** The Pause of Joe

40 **FANNY HOWE:** The Border

46 **ANA MENDIETA:** Eight Earthworks

54 ***"EARTH FROM CUBA, SAND FROM VARADERO" A TRIBUTE TO ANA MENDIETA*** *[Edited by Clayton & Caryl Eshleman]*

- **JOHN PERREAULT:** Ana Mendieta (1948-1985)
- **An Interview with RAQUEL (KAKI) MENDIETA by NEREYDA GARCIA-FERRAZ** *[Edited by Kate Horsfield]*
- **An Interview with ANA MENDIETA by LINDA MONTANO**
- **ANA MENDIETA:** A Selection of Statements and Notes
- **HANS BREDER:** Ana Mendieta: Imprints / Student Years 1972-1977
- **LUCY R. LIPPARD:** "Trying to sort out a kaleidoscope. . ."
- **ROBERT RODALE:** Nice Work
- **EDUARDO COSTA:** "I have before me a letter. . ."
- **LOWERY STOKES SIMS:** Ana Mendieta: A Reminiscence
- **MARSHA PELS:** "Ana Mendieta was a rare, visionary. . ."
- **AL NODAL:** "Today I sit here with Ana's picture. . ."
- **HOWARDENA PINDELL:** "No matter where she was in the world. . ."
- **RAQUEL MENDIETA HARRINGTON:** "A nuestra Madre Universal. . ."

E N T S

NANCY SPERO: "Ana Mendieta's art is implacable. . ."
JOHN PERREAULT: Analog
MIRA SCHOR: "Ana Mendieta was two months shy. . ."
CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN: Hand / Heart for Ana
CLAYTON ESHLEMAN: Galactite
B. RUBY RICH: Ana Mendieta: A Postscript

115 **GARY SNYDER:** Five Poems

121 **BRUCE ANDREWS:** from Strictly Confidential

123 **CLARK COOLIDGE:** Regarding Morton Feldman's Music. . .

130 **STEPHEN RATCLIFFE:** from Nine

135 **DION FARQUHAR:** Treading Culture

149 **HILDA MORLEY:** Out of Nothing

152 **WILLIAM CORBETT:** Introducing Ben Watkins

154 **BEN WATKINS:** Six Photographs

160 **NOTES, CORRESPONDENCE, REVIEWS:** Dizikes on N.O. Brown; Silliman on New American Poetry; Davidson and Weinberger on Language Poetry; DuPlessis and Eshleman on the Davidson/Weinberger exchange; Weinberger's final response; Tiffany on Pound, Bataille and Benjamin

210 **A *SULFUR* INDEX (Issues #1-21)** Compiled by Martine Mickiewicz

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I know myself, Robert Duncan, to be mortal. Before 1919 certain likenesses of what I am appeared over and over again among animals as Man, within the species as racial variety, as Iberian and Celt; and among my forefathers hints even of what I was specifically to be had life and died. Paracelsus tells us: "What lies in the remotest corner of the earth casts its shadow on man, and man is suffused with what lies in the depth of the sea." This is the meaning of evolution that thru process we have our share in all of creation and thus are of God. I have a likeness in the Fish. But what *I* am is only an instance of a series of me that moves thru time precisely because it continually dies away from itself in being born into itself. This is what it means to be mortal: to wax and wane, to have genius in the moment and to perish therein, to come into being and pass out of being in order to be at all, and to enact this drama in a period of gestation (which restates the multitude of evolution toward one mortal fact, in the throws of birth itself (which enacts the uniqueness of this fact, in the throws of death itself (which enacts the mortality of this fact), and in dissolution and decay (which falls away from in order to admit that there is immortality only in God). Paracelsus tells us again: "As soon as a child is conceived, it receives its own heaven." I have my own life and my own time because I am utterly mortal; it is indeed by the virtue of these boundaries of birth and death which are the grace of God that I have this tenancy of myself. Thus I know that I am not the Poet. As a "poet" I am only an instance and instrument of the Poet that I imagine—that is, Who is real, and Whose work is immortal Poetry, is Reality.

ROBERT DUNCAN
Stinson Beach, 1959

Cited with the permission of the Estate of Robert Duncan.

CORAL BRACHO

ON THE FACETS: THE FLASHING*

(Tr. from the Spanish
by Thomas Hoeksema)

The rhizome, like a subterranean stalk. . .assumes, by itself, very diverse shapes: from its superficial extension magnified in many ways, to its manifestation in bulbs and tubers.

Desire is the creator of reality. . .it produces and moves forward by means of rhizomes.

An intensive feature begins to act by itself. . .

Deleuze and Guattari, *Rhizomes*

In the parched word, unformulated, it shrinks,
rancid brown membrane ((that is: a delicate drop of oil for the
morning radiance
of the boundaries, for the tepid
line, well-traveled, that crosses, like a limpid hue, above
the vast sizzling, over the burdened back,
bulb—a drop of animal saliva:
for the inflections, for the fertilized dawn (caress)
which expands to the shore, like foam, a relief;
a fruit-bearing fur—an ulcer of light, a basting: for
expressions fragrant to the touch, to the wrinkled shadow,
coveted;
a voice, a loose fiber—a fleece—at random from the chisels,
from the strum of the pick)
on the crest, at the flank, of the magnetizations;
Strokings

* A rhizome section seen by microscope; the partridge is a potato cell. The rest appears to be or forms part of the landscape: examine it for what is connected to the libido of horses.

and the hair language of rubbings in the lobed bowl
of the bodies. Purple
at the root;

a sponge, a lime, an axillary
mirror: and in the echoes,

stature:
a lark. Rhymes in the lavender;
ice: by the liminal rump, smooth restless animal lips.
Hirsute valve,
alliance, in the overturning; plexus and tendon:
a warmth, a synovial point under the veined delights: ducts
to the pale hidden summit;
a splinter, a ribbon (cat),
an embryo for the bronze of rampant thickets, intimable;
a boiling, a dishevelled mass, a spore:

Cope-tails ajar at the peak of an inguinal taste.
Above the manes; kicks:

In the customary moulds, challenged, of existing, in
their smoky, ovulating rears:
a precise icicle,
an oil-lamp.
Cliffs.

and in the slimy folds, hints of existing,
and on its pungent banks of sand;
pearly figs; laughter;

a lemon on the excited fringes;
tearing: with inaudible glazed currycombs (wine, prehensile
and shaggy),
with thorns the mood, the hooves;

sparking laughter between the inspected
bulbs, the magpies;
phosphorus, winks, echoes
in the claw; the partridge
leaps.

The partridge: fresh bird, plentiful, with solid thighs;
marked sexual dimorphism. Its red feathers, ashen,
conceal. Leaps in ejective parabola above the strawberries;
a fluttering fever. Has gray flanks (Boiling
spongy strawberries, they exhale—from their poppy swamps,
from their verbal mesentery—the delectable lye), slender legs,
a short flight; it runs (sumptuous, overflowing taste)
rapidly.

Opens its full clean lips:
the juice moistens and scents its harness; on its skin
of random stings, eagerly encircles the graceful one,
kicking; the slippery simultaneous nectar
sinks; amazement; vast amazement
among the high-pitched buds;
kneeling, on dazzling knee-backs, erect.
On the bicep, the scrotums; Radiant, acrid. Trots.
Curbed by the illuminated
rumps; cadences; convex rhythm; violet-colored
paroxysms: face down
among deep resonances. Extendible peduncles below the belt:

Sucking from the bubbling shapes; the tongue between
the linking textures, pristine
vulvas in thermal springs, rain for the splintered
nuclei; turbulent rhizomes between the streams, the
jubilant, foaming furs of existence;
beneath fermentable reins, the blankets.
Absorbed
in the beds, expansive. Inundated.
Sensitive forms through the exacerbated straw, sprouting. Vital,
imperishable in their sudden impulses, smooth and tainted
by their ocher,
their splendor, in their yolks; unique to the rubbing
pupils.
Stampede of flames between the furrows, the peppers, the
traces; dense
and exaltable on their tips: by smell. Mineral
burst. A line, a caboose, a speck of dust; Gargoyle.
An ant in the joyful tufts, by the thighs,
the belly; in words)) taut, murky,

it shrinks, harsh membrane ((citric. The perpetual shrillness on the edges)) drab; its net dims ((on the lubricated boundaries, the
pistil.

—His voice: savoring, performing, plundering it—Light;
in excitable spaces, the seditious act. Labial,
expandable below the cool forefinger, its smoothness; they press.

Magnetism aroused to tasty excess,
the grating. The tickling summits.
—Turning sour, squeezing—in wild splittings,
tender. Vortex. Between the irons, the thistles,
instinct. Stubborn rodents
among the threads, the squares, the sieve. A clod,
a lanceolate breath, an itch.
To trail below the jammed, intensive zones.
Papillary knots among the grass. On the facets: the flashing.
An awl, an insect in the words)) sluggish,
crammed ((between the cracks the caesuras, on the reins.
Sudden and wanton they focus them—His voice: slitting it,
opening it, choosing it—, they encircle and cohabit on reflecting
edges)), hollows; their opaque crust ((among the screams,
the fetlocks, the clefts. To exist:))

SUSAN HOWE

"on a [*p* < suddenly. . .on a > was shot thro with a dyed → < dyed → a soft]"*
(became the vision)(the rea) after Though [though]That
Fa

But what is envy [but what is envy]
Is envy the bonfire inkling?

Shackles [(shackles)] as we were told the. . .[precincts]

* *Billy Budd:* The Genetic Text

A Vengeance must be
a story
Trial and suffering
of Mercy
Any narrative question
away in the annals
the old army
Enlightened rationalism

dreadful at Hell
bears go in dens
No track by night
No coming out
in the otherday
on wild thoughtpath
Face of adamant
steel of the face
Breast

In the Parmenidean text

locked riddles gust
Early times

Eov and Ev

Land of anything
Forgotten preservation of

everything

Other prophets
Propriety Property

Grindstone

In the clock of Easter
and fire

Essence and essential error

Own political literature

Stoic iconic Collective
Soliloquy and the aside

Suppose finite this is
relict struggle embrace

Violent order of a world

Iconoclastic folio subgenre

a life lived by shifts
evil fortunes of another

Halfway through *Wanderings*
walks the lean Instaurator

Birth of contemporary thought
Counter thought thought out

Consumable commodity

a Zero-sum game
and consequent

spiral haze stricture

Distance or outness

Phrase edged away

Money runs after goods
Men desire money

Wages of labor
Wages in a mother country

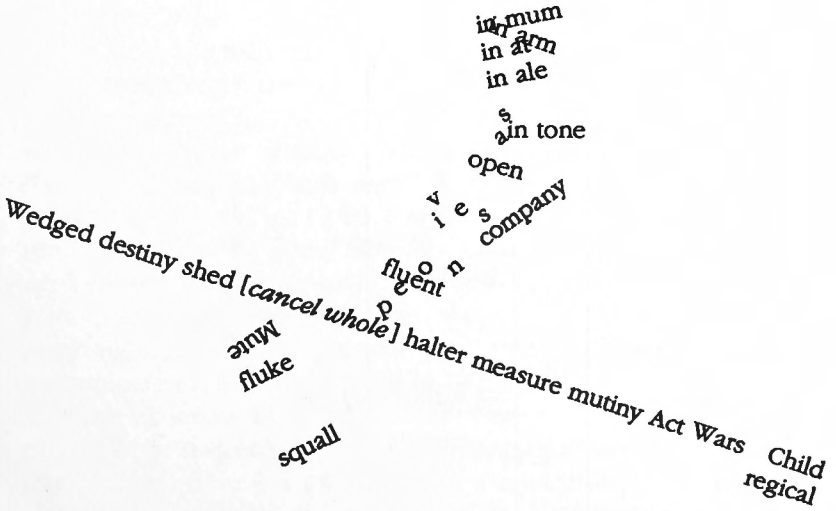
Authorial withdrawal

Will as fourth wall

My heavy heavy child

hatchet-heartedness
of the Adversary

On anonymity Anonymity


in mum
in arm
in ale
in tone
open
company
fluent
Wedged destiny shed [*cancel whole*] halter measure mutiny Act Wars Child
regical
fluke
squall

Human [authoritative] human!
They cumbered the ground.
Record
Freak within of the heart
Secret fact a title given

THE REVISER

DREAMING, WRITING

(Tr. from the French by Richard Sieburth)

I remember the spare, slender collection of books entitled "l'Age d'or" in which, alongside other French and foreign works (including volumes by Georges Bataille, René Char, Maast, Limbour, Leonara Carrington, as well as Grabbe and Brentano), the initial *Nights* of Michel Leiris appeared. Now that these dreams, companions of forty years, have been published in their chronological sequence and precisely as they were transcribed, we are tempted to read them as an addition to his life, or better yet, as a supplement to that project of self-description and self-understanding through writing which Michel Leiris continues to pursue without respite. This was perhaps the way I read them at the very outset, and I remember a striking dream that seemed to bring to bear on the night the same surveillance, the same investigation that the author of *L'Age d'Homme [Manhood]* has placed at the very center of his writerly concerns: *"Waking up (with a shriek that Z. . . muffles) from the following dream: as if to catch a glimpse of something. I insert my head into an opening that resembles an oeil-de-boeuf window overlooking a dark, enclosed area akin to those cylindrical pisé granary silos that I saw in Africa. . My anxiety derives from the fact that as I lean over this enclosed area and get a glimpse of its inner darkness, I am actually gazing into myself."* [July 12-13, 1940].

One observes that the dreamer here in no way pursues the project of introspection to which he seems so attached during the day. At issue here is a translation or a transcription of this project into the language of the night, not its implementation; and the anxiety is not provoked by the discovery of the disquieting realities that might be gathered in one's innermost depths, but rather by the motion of looking into oneself and seeing nothing but the

contraction of a closed, unlit space. Three years later [March 19-20, 1943], another dream comes back to this motion, now taking itself directly as a theme: it is the dream of a dream that is ending, but instead of rising toward awakening, instead of struggling to emerge out of itself, the dream surreptitiously invites the dreamer to find a lower exit, that is, plunge into the depths of another sleep that will no doubt never end. What these two dreams have in common, what is grasped and lived as image by both, is the very motion of turning back: in the former, it involves a turning back upon oneself, such as simple imagery might ascribe to introspection; in the latter, the dream turns back on itself as if to surprise or survey itself, thus identifying itself with an inverse vigilance, a second-degree state of wakefulness in search of its own limits.

This turning-away motion is characteristic. The person who dreams turns away from the person who sleeps; the dreamer is not the sleeper: at times dreaming that he is not dreaming and therefore that he is not sleeping; at times dreaming that he is dreaming and hence, by this flight into a more inner dream, convincing himself that the first dream is not a dream, or else knowing that he is dreaming and then waking up in an identical dream which is nothing else but an ongoing escape from dream, which is an endless plunge into a similar dream (and so on and so forth through various twists and turns). This perversion (whose troubling implications for the state of waking Roger Caillois has described in his invaluable *L'incertitude qui vient des rêves),* seems to me related to a question that crops up naively and treacherously each and every night: Who dreams in dreams? Who is the "I" of dreams? Who is the person to whom this "I" is attributed, admitting that there is one? Between the person who is sleeping and the person who is the subject of dream events there is a fissure, a hint of an interval, a difference in structure; clearly it's not someone else, an entirely different person, but what exactly is it? And if, upon waking, we hastily and greedily take possession of the night's adventures as if they belonged to us, do we not do so with a certain sense of usurpation (as well as gratitude), do we not carry with us the memory of an irreducible distance, a peculiar sort of distance, a distance between self and self, but also a distance between all the characters and the various identities (however certain) we confer on them, a distance without distance, illuminating and fascinating, somewhat like nearing the far-off or

making contact with remoteness? Such events and questions refer us back to an experience often described of late—the experience of the writer who writes the word "I" in a narrative, poetic or dramatic work without knowing who is saying it nor what relation this "I" bears to himself.

In this sense dream is perhaps already close to literature, at least to its enigmas, its tricks of magic, and its illusions.

But let me return to Michel Leiris. For a man so deeply concerned with himself and so intent on explaining himself, the reserve he maintains vis-a-vis his dreams strikes me as remarkable. He notes them or, more precisely, he writes them. He does not ask questions of them. This is not mere cautiousness; it is well known that there is nobody more intrepid than he when it comes to inspecting the self, a process in which he invites us to participate by his own reckless frankness. He is knowledgeable, moreover, about psychoanalysis; he knows its mythology, its ruses, its boundless curiosity; more than anybody else, he would certainly be able to undo his dreams and read them as documents. Which is precisely what he forbids himself to do, and if he publishes his dreams it is not so that we might enjoy the pleasure of deciphering them, but rather so that we might display the same discretion, taking them for what they are, accepting them in their own light, and learning to seize in them the traces of an affirmation that is literary rather than psychoanalytical or autobiographical: These were once dreams; they are now signs of poetry.

Naturally we must admit that an exactness of relation obtains between the dream state and the writing state. It's not a question of making a literary work out of nighttime elements that have been transformed, embellished, perverted, or mimed by poetic means. Precision is part of the rules of the game. Writing takes hold of dream from the outside; the presentness of dream coincides with the non-presence of writing. At least this is the postulate of the enterprise that might be formulated as follows: I dream, therefore it gets written. [Je rêve, donc cela s'écrit].

*

Let us in turn dream about this supposed kinship of dreaming and writing, not to mention speaking. The person who wakes up in the morning experiences a curious urge to *tell:* he immediately

seeks out some listener whom he would like to have participate in the wonders he has just undergone, and is occassionally somewhat surprised to discover that this listener does not share in his amazement. There are dark exceptions—fatal dreams—but for the most we are happy with our dreams, we are proud of them, filled with the naive pride that might befit authors, convinced as we are that we have created an original work while dreaming, even though we refuse any responsibility for it. One should nonetheless ask oneself whether such a work truly seeks to become public, whether every dream seeks to speak itself, even though it be in a veiled manner. The ancient Sumerians were convinced that dreams should be recounted, recited. This was so that their magic power could be released as quickly as possible. Recounting the dream was the best way of avoiding its negative consequences; or one might decide to inscribe its characteristic signs on a slab of clay which one then threw into the water: the clay slab prefigured the book; the water, its audience. The wisdom of Islam nonetheless seems more sensible: the dreamer is advised to choose his confidant with great care or even to keep his secret to himself rather than revealing it to the wrong person. "The dream," it is said, "belongs to the first interpreter; you should only recount it in secret, just as it was given to you in secret. . .And bad dreams should be recounted to no one."

We recount our dreams for some obscure reason: in order to render them more real, to share with someone else the singularity that belongs to them and that would appear to destine them to one person alone. But there are further reasons as well: to appropriate them and to establish ourselves, through our common speech, not only as the master of our dreams but as their principal actor, thereby decisively taking possession of this similar though eccentric being who was us over the course of the night.

*

Where does it come from, this eccentricity that marks the simplest of dreams and makes of them a present, a unique presence that we would like others to witness as well? The answer is perhaps already contained in the word itself. Lacking a center or rather slightly exterior to the center around which it is organized

(or around which we reorganize it) and therefore situated at an inappreciable or imperceptible distance from us, lies that deep dream from which we can nonetheless not claim we are absent since on the contrary it brings with it an overpowering certainty of presence. But to whom does it bring it? It's like some presence that might well dismiss or else forget our capacity to be present in it. Do we not frequently get the impression that we are taking part in a spectacle not meant for us or that we are looking over someone's shoulder at some unexpected truth, some image we have yet to grasp? The fact is that we are not really there to grasp it: the show is being put on for someone who is not watching it in person and who does not have the status of a subject who is present. If dreams seem so foreign, it is because we find ourselves in the situation of strangers; and we are strangers precisely because the dreamer's self lacks any sense of true self. One could almost say that there is nobody in the dream and therefore, in a certain fashion, that there is nobody to dream it; hence the suspicion that when we are dreaming there is also someone else dreaming, someone who is dreaming us and who in turn is being dreamed by someone else, a premonition of that dream without a dreamer that would be the dream of the night itself. (An idea that from Plato to Nietzsche, from Lao Tse to Borges, recurs at the four cardinal points of dream thinking.)

Yet in this space that is as it were suffused with an impersonal light whose source escapes us (we almost never manage, even after the fact, to determine the lighting of dreams: as if they retained their clarity—diffuse, lambent, latent—in the absence of any precise center of light or of vision), there are nonetheless figures whom we manage to identify, among whom the very figure who figures us. In Michel Leiris's *Nights,* not only do we meet the author at various periods of his life but we also meet friends of his who have kept their own names and perhaps even their own faces and customary mannerisms. To be expected. Resemblances abound in dreams, for everyone in them tends to be extremely, wondrously similar: in fact, this is their only identity, they resemble, they belong to a domain that scintillates with pure resemblance: a resemblance that is sometimes steady and fixed, sometimes unstable and adrift (though always certain), fascinating and stirring each and every time. Consider the powerful spell a chance

passerby can cast on us if, for a split second, he bears a resemblance; we are drawn to his face; it haunts us; familiar and distant, it also frightens us a bit; we quickly try to identify it, that is, to erase it by guiding it back into that circle of things where actual human beings are so bound up with themselves that they are without resemblance. A being who suddenly starts "resembling" takes on a distance from real life, passes over into another world, enters into the inaccessible proximity of the image while nonetheless remaining present, though his presence is not his own or somebody else's—an apparition who transforms all other presences into appearances. And this resemblance, during the (infinite) space of time that it asserts itself, is not merely some vague relation to a specific individuality; it is resemblance pure and simple—neutral as it were. Whom does the resembler resemble? Neither this person nor that: he resembles no one, or an elusive Somebody—as is clear in the case of corpses, when the person who has just died begins to resemble himself, solemnly rejoining himself via his likeness, gradually fusing into this beautiful, foreign, impersonal being who is like a double slowly surfacing from the depths.

The same holds true for dreams: dreams are sites of similitude, mediums saturated with resemblances, in which some neutral power of similarity, existing prior to any particular designation, is constantly on the lookout for a figure whom, if need be, it might activate into a likeness. It is Faust's mirror, and what he sees in this mirror is neither the young girl nor the likeness of her face, but rather resemblance itself, the undefined power of similarity, the infinite scintillation of reflection. And let us note that dreams are often traversed by the premonition of this game of resemblances that is being played out in them; how often do we wake up asking ourselves: Who is this creature? And right away, at the very same moment, we manage to match him or her up to such and such a person or to someone else and so on down the line, until we reach the point where the resemblance stops flitting furtively from figure to figure and agrees to reincorporate itself into a definitive form, submitting to the waking self which alone has the power to interrupt the process.

I will not pursue these reflections any further. We do not willingly admit that the dreamer only relates to himself through resemblance, the he too is a figure of the Similar—the non-identi-

cal—and that, given this similitude, he readily becomes anybody and anything. Still, this self seen in image, this self which is but an image of the Self and which is incapable of withdrawing into itself and therefore of putting itself into doubt, this self whose certainty is so rigid is indeed a strange self, no more a subject than an object, but rather the shadow of itself, a flickering shadow that frees itself from us like some replica that is more true because it is at once more similar and less familiar. In the depth of dreams—admitting they have a depth, a depth that is all surface—lies an allusion to the possibility of anonymous being, so that to dream is to accept this invitation to exist almost anonymously, beside oneself, drawn outside of oneself, released on the enigmatic bail of semblance: a selfless self, unable to recognize itself as such since it cannot be its own subject. Who (even upon the invitation of the evil genius) would dare transfer to the dreamer the prerogative of the Cogito? Who would allow him to state with utter assurance: "I dream, therefore I am?" One might at most suggest that he say: "Where I dream, it is awake" ["Là où je rêve, cela veille"], a vigilance that takes dream by surprise and that indeed comprises, within a present devoid of duration, the waking state of a presence devoid of persons, a non-presence in which no being ever occurs, and whose grammatical form would be the "He" that designates neither one nor the other: this monumental "He" that Michel Leiris anxiously sees himself become as he looks at himself in the empty, unlit depths of his silo.

*

Dreams are a temptation for writing because writing may well also deal with this same neutral vigilance that the nighttime of sleep seeks to extinguish but that the nighttime of dream awakens and maintains, even as it perpetuates being by a semblance of existence. More specifically, although it borrows the neutrality and the uncertainty that belong to the night, although it imitates this power of imitation and resemblance that is without origin, writing not only refuses all the agencies of sleep, all the facilities of unconsciousness, all the bliss of torpidity, but turns toward dreams because the latter, in their refusal to slumber off in the midst of sleep, constitute a further vigilance at the gathering point of the night, a lucidity that is always present, moving, captive no doubt,

but therefore captivating. Sleep grows sleepless in dreams, and it is tempting to believe that this insomnia links us back, whether by allusion or illusion, to those waking nights that the Ancients termed sacred, nights laden with and devoid of darkness, long sleepless nights that correspond to the unmastered motion of inspiration that continues to allure us each time we hear something earlier speaking to us without speaking, indefinite in utterance, seeming to say everything to us prior to anything being said, perhaps actually speaking to us, but only in a semblance of speech. "Were it not for these horrible sleepless nights," wrote Kafka, "I would never write." And René Char, in less anecdotal fashion: *"Poetry lives on perpetual sleeplessness."* This is indeed what it lives on, undergoing this nightless night as Michel Leiris has called it, this night that is doubly nocturnal given this absence and subtraction of itself from itself, this night from which we too are subtracted and concealed and thereby transformed into something that remains awake, something that even as we sleep allows us no sleep: suspended between being and non-being. As Hölderlin reminds us in such precise terms: *"In the state between being and non-being, the possible becomes everywhere real, the real becomes ideal, and this, in art's free imitation, is a dream at once terrifying and divine.*

1961

AMIRI BARAKA

THE PAUSE OF JOE

Philly Joe Jones
Joseph Jones
of Philly

Arc of bones
on board
in the sea's darkness
being bones
of the being beaten

of the Joes
the eyes
of the sleekest
thou seekest our injury
Being
Us
& the bones beat
beat out

as the drums are
a form of space

its life containing
Whatever must exist
trace
flight
flame
these years of times lasso
the cross eyed deity
of laughter
beat bones

tell the blood
the Blood's
story

His
story .

The Beat of Joe
I eye
the Kansas city 4 man
came on Winged Feet
Thats yr Papa
Eye Eye
A Spanish guy
The story teller

Jo Jo

Story telling bones
Blood
Stones
Death
& Life
Tones

Tell The Story Joe
Eye Story
Yo Man
Jo Man

As yr beaten lives and grows
the grapevine of the world serpent
shakes, Tell the Story Joe

We're no grimace
in this menace
as if minutes

this telling
blow
Joe

For darkness, under sea lingo
tengo
mucho
story we
no can say

Let bones beat it
take the air
above the trees
a herd of me's

Tell the Story
Joe
Philly Dilly
Bone speech
Sleek

of the Dead Seek
Bones Speak

Griot
Story Teller
From Philadelphia
Which DuBois Analyzed

Found The Negroes
Wise
& Thriving On A Riff
Thriving beneath the Veil
This Century's Jail
Yee Slave Folk
& Masters
Yee Magic Cans
of the Streets
& thrilling ghettos
Where the Slums
beat like a boom a doom
Cage
for the Africans

to beat out
their age
to let out their
Rage
Be a Bone
& Speak, Joe
You & He from Kansas
City
The Four-Man
& Bats' Kin He mimics
to teach us
In Omen Land
The Count
Processed In Funk
Some Monkish Draculaics
For the visiting Klan, The Bone
Beats
Hides
Speak
This Political Tongue
Speech of Marches
The Black
Fire Men
Their Sirens Tell of Escapes
Joe Griot dusts his iron tales
the metal sings industrial Blues
Machine Funk.

You wd *have to be* hip
to *be w/* Miles
So Bad
Was He
This King of MaMa Rappers
Black Sweet Swift
reflections of night
in his shining hair
I was there
The Music in his stare

of Philly-ness
& Joe-ness
& for Eloise even
Joseph-ness
The Lone Star
above the
rhythm House.

We said
Miles & Trane
& Philly
& Them
(that's Paul & Red
& Blue Cannon Ball
Fusing The Master Classic
Bop-Cool
& Harder Bopper
School
The State of the Art
For those who come to play
The Heart's
Message

For Bravery
For Philadelphia Jokes
For such gladness
as only a friend
can give
or know
or be
Free as his Shakerei
brushes
Mississippi Sound

Joseph The Father
Max The Son
Joseph The Holy
Philadelphia
Ghost
& Klook be they
Bops

As our hearts
locked in sun

Tell the history

Like Joe & I
& Archie
one night

What Bad Tadd said
Philly JJ

The Bones Song
Dameronia
So we knew Joe to speak
Yo can seek
We the see
Bop the Be

Free Joe
His style as form's
essence
yet the rumble

the reach
beneath black seas

to rail roads of ebony
skeletons

on the way to Slavery
land
Us Congos
held by a
Square
Joe
was there

Mr Jones

Mr. Joseph Rudolf Jones
from Philadelphia
So bad a city
took his name
& so its fame
despite those evil servants

of 666
who have
come
to
No Goode!

He breathed our history as
his walking beat

Bones & Hide
Shimmering
metal
strut.

Dixie Peach
2/4
Napoleon
We copped
yr band
for coming

against our will
Toussaint
& Christophe
& Sidney Bechet
copped
took it wherever other
bone sings
sun
hide
beats

the niggers
of the orchestra sd Max

quite
naturally
Yo, man
Joe,
can

You wd have to be hip to
hang out
w/ Miles
& Trane
To have a city
use yr
name

To get the bones
to beat its name

Brothers
Do Love
& Negroes be here
too

& Crazy Benjamin
out there
messin
w/ that
electricity
"Boy, you better
come up
out the rain
w/ that
key

Try See, Yo
Jo
about here

Africa
The South
New Orleans
Blue
Spanish Tinge
City Rock
Miles Stones
Funky Blues

On A Misty Night, Lady Bird
The Bones
Speak
of Rag & Swing
& Boogie

of March
& Colored Ghosts

Ashé Ashé
Guanguanco
Signifying Elegba
God of Laughter & *Jasm*

Beater of Bones & Hides
Singer w/ Golden Symbols
Bop Be
Be
Thy Name

Domesticater of Animals
Master of the Fields & Flowering Seeds
Builder of Houses in One Place
Keeper of the Herds

Speaker of a thousand tongues
some as swift
as the wind

City Man
Collector of Art
& culture
Creator of Museums
& Libraries

Civilizer
of the Dark

Introducer
of the *Human*
Being

Poet of Industrial Design
Machine Singer

Language Maker
Song & Dance
Man

Yo
there is no
Urban
No post-desert
Science
w/o yr tom toms
& shades
Yo, Jo
I & I

& The Four-Man now also gone

So we who remain
who know the game
who have seen slavery
give way to the Gestapo

& see the slow worm
of fascism

pop out
Reagan headed

from a cancerous
nose

Those of us who do
knows

That Duke & Count
& John Before
& Pres & Louie
& then Thelonius

& before two suns
Both the Father
& the Ghost

How much strength
is our history

How much Beauty
& Dancing
How much struggle
is our memory

Our Dream of
Democracy

Bone Man
Beat Darkness
into Singing
Sun

into Colored
Rhythms

Against the
Boers

& No Goodes

A hipper time than
Pendulums

much clearer
than Clarence

Let it Be Known Now that you
Carriers of the
Torch
of the Created
Advancing
Mind

That throughout this world
Huge Changes Ready
to go
Down

From the top
Let the baton of rhythms
of riddims
of Rap
Reggae
of the Sorrow Songs

The hide & rock
roll & beat
shimmer of street

tough growling
shaded
Orisha of
Bop Bee

They say in prayer to the living
now & forever
Our Jasm

Creators
in life
of its hearts
essence

It's on you
they say:

(now
it's on
you)

All our history

Slavery &
Ghosts
Maniac Kings
Who sold us in chains

For Duke & Monk
& John & Thelonius
& Yo, double Joe

The Father
& the Wholly Philadelphia
Ghost

They're Hear-ing
is a hum of old grandmothers
a hum of deacons
a hum of Lindy Hopping Rappers
of Cake Walkers
Tappers, Yo, Jo
I Know
You had to go
This slow poison world
Cdn't handle you

Yet your hear-ing
is your bone
beat
hide under
hand &
stick

the riddim say
It's On You

rookieeeeeeeeeeeee

Do Bana Coba
Do Bana Coba

Beneme Beneme

I heard my man the other day
Joe Say

Beating the telling
Bones
Yo, Rookie
Yng blood
Bigging People
of a Vision
a riddim
a desire
a fire
of human science
love a beat
a heart

Nation to Be
Rising to We
Free Nation
To See

says:
Its on you

on you now
on you

This Music
of our world's
Description

Hymn For The As We wd
Say Him
Self

One of
The Great

MaMa Lamas

The Man
So Hip
A City
Took
His
Name!!

PHILADELPHIA JOE JONES 7/19/23 - 8/30/85

The Arts Foundation of Michigan, a private funding agency which supports Michigan artists, welcomes *Sulfur* magazine to its new home in Michigan and is proud to provide financial support for this issue. To receive information on the AFM's funding programs, please call Kimberly Adams at (313) 871-0559 or write AFM, 542 New Center Building, 7430 Second, Detroit, MI 48202.

afM

FANNY HOWE

THE BORDER

For one thing, my loneliness was intense. It became my condition by a process of elimination made without logic or choice. She lost three pints of semen over the long run, each one was a wee child. Meanwhile my emerald did not change, but stayed as solid as a frozen ocean, a bottle chip, a chameleon on a leaf.

I lacked a community beyond my family and had but two friends with whom I could discuss sacred texts. A truant child was hidden in myself on the way to church and a playing card with a duck painted on it, the kind you kill. I thought I'd like to be children again in an illustration, mallard-colored.

The rest of the time she labored in front of strangers. When a black hole swallows matter, it's light years away from earth and millions of times as far away as Pluto. We're really lucky. Out of it comes a stream of ex-rays and green prayers.

When I lay in blankets in the dark and empty house I heard sounds which made me cringe. Fuck you, someone shouted. But on my flying carpet, I could go as high as cloud-seeding experiments in the Sierra Nevada. It was there that I felt like a surrogate mother raising the question, who owns the individual?

Night sounds were neither animal nor technological and the stars moved abnormally fast. I felt that Abba was demanding my attention then, yearning for it (here I say "my" and "I" but always mean "human") out of its spatial isolation. Another Santa Ana was moving in, peaking air pollution and surf was swell. From Point Pinos to Point Conception, hazardous seas and escapees. The sea under the rising sun was like an oriental rug for lying and flying on.

She wants only to get close to Alpha and Omega so there will be no more fear of the world. High fertility rates among the Latino and

black communities make others hate them. Today the surf will be six feet, a green ray like lime pie on a watery table will follow the sunset. Caused by transport smog, white caterpillars finger up the interstate.

To accept the duality of Jah is an impossibility. It is a contradiction in terms and must not enter the head of any individual. Technology's cunning turns halos into auras. It makes morbid men who only like snow-women with berries for lips. But I say that snow's white powder should knock down the high price of software and crystal.

The soul is a space and cries out to Jah who is the rest of it. But the mind tries to remember everything the ancestors said.

Those queer night sounds and the speed at which the stars machined their path through the sky—or was it the earth moving? I never remember—Were Abba's attempts at capturing me. But when G-d is a metaphor for d—th, then I cry out: Rescue me from Yahweh my enemy, and from unjust people and their decisions. Why should I care? Why has the enemy thrown me this far from home? Why is my enemy my only hiding place, where I feel safe in the world?

She assumes the enlightened one will forgive her who casts her eyes towards the earth where flowers doll up the plod through dust. And she senses that humans are a race of elves. It makes her laugh.

She lives with an oppressive sense of eternity and its presence in her and is truly impatient of people who say, "You're lucky. Your faith must make you very happy." How is she supposed be happy with eternity? Can you tell me that? You must be crazy. What exists is named specifically, and there is no specific name for G-d. In the mountains are snow guns and enough high-tech gauges to pilot a Lear Jet. The wild cats leap down a hill called Sheep Dip. In lace tulle and millinery flowers stands the bride of snowmen.

I only want you to know that the bread of heaven feeds the poor human soul begging only to be nourished in peace. Wastewater is recycled into drinking water. There are lots of wonderful Americans

out there whose self-hatred takes the form of rejecting immigrants. The sky is teeming with hidden blue machinery. And each act is a signature of thought.

I knew it was unpopular to think there was a city in the sky, one which scientists and satellites couldn't see, and even as I tormented myself with the idiocy of such a concept, I counted its turrets.

A command came out of the river: mistreat the dark man. She felt weary and grave, a pilgrim bewitched by drugs and shades. Like a horse wearing a veil, the man at the border patrol, asking for i.d.'s.

Everything is structured and complete. There is no physical matter that does not contain its precedent. Yet we are given lies and clamber up the facts like old hippos. At the zoo the animals are hardly more alive than photographs, yet people stand and snap pictures of these images.

I think we all want to get back to the beginning to see what happened next. Physicists, as hard-headed as peanuts, want this as much as anyone. They talk about eddying water and how the ripples all come together in patterns of patterns. I've heard them. They are desperate to understand what happened first.

With a ring in his earlobe, sandy hair and red fuzz on his white upper lip, the patrolman acted like her boss. Two whites hovered over some fossils, and pink pajamas were hot and excited at the end of the motel. Oranges hung on trees and in the eyes of the orangutan was the whole world.

Down the river in rubber, the alien was a kind of mud wall with eyes. Grass swayed where the hunters puffed. She spoke of the body material. Who belonged where and to whom. In Balboa Park one immigrant's mouth full of mud made her spit. She remembered a floating head, water full of dogs and wooden noses. Empty yourself to G-d, she said.

The earth trembles here and the orange rocks are heaved up at an angle in the deep canyons. This is a place where you can wash in the wind, but can never return to the heavy city.

My enemy is often my leader, especially when I have everything I need. He takes me where there are landmines, then, and where there is fresh water. I have less fear when my enemy is my guide because he draws me into meandering areas where I feel protected from the long shadows of evening. He comforts me. He knows where the dangers are that he himself planted. So how could I feel safer than when I am with him?

Once she was wedlocked. She married him on her knees. Now she doesn't give her secrets away to any man. Like a gnome who fell from the sky in a bag and flopped around screaming on the ground, she's at the mercy of her birth-weight and nothing else. The fact is, humanity has an adversarial relationship to that space which threatens the material body. In the desire to appease the wrath or appetite of this space, we develop many forms of behavior, most of them in postures of terror.

The new franchise includes McHospital, McMarket, McChurch and McSchool. A grandfather's course in quantum mechanics would have him canoeing along the banks of McMammoth Lake saying, Come on up. No one likes McSomeone McEveryone likes. It's all mechanics. A tiny school of fish between lots of fresh snow is that man's giddying scripture.

The St. Augustine bingo program and the price of cement in Mexico are connected by a convent. They paid her to laugh and brought the price on cement down at the border every time she did. By this time the sight of a uniformed police officer was a comfort. Back at Pleasanton Federal Prison, people wondered which one of the twin cities was the right one.

Little fishes go in and out of a net and don't even know they're "all wet." Diabolus simius Dei.

Stimulate ovulation in a dragon and you need to collect semen preserved in an old kimono. But who owns the seed? Confusions mark the end of an era. However negative, it's necessary to press on.

I think airplanes need eyeglasses as much as their pilots do. Technology has run ahead of ethics. Blustery weather in San Diego Bay and northeast is a dreamscape on the berm on Sunrise highway. Bright colored sleds, a rolling fog. In a materialist world the body is the ultimate possession of value. You feel like someone left in a refrigerator for years. Geographies are as cozy as nurseries or weddings smothered in headpieces, tulle, favors, bouquets, corsages and ribbons by the bolt.

At the Rosarito Beach Hotel, a blue tiled bathroom and a blue tiled pool, white wicker chairs and the sea and horses. They had travelled on foot over black sand with rippling lines like shells in the mountains. Olive trees and jars of condiments at roadside stands. Is desperation truer than joy? Green seahorses on the tiled floor were nearly worn away by the vomit of American marines.

If ideology can be a substitute for action, then so can questions be clues. The muff and stick were in bed pretending to be illegal aliens. So ideas suffer humiliations you never even dreamed about.

Twin dogs in matching plaid sweaters stopped in the back of a truck at the border. One ran after a bugger, another after a beggar.

I was building an orphanage. My excitement was prodigious. A bad mother sat on the beach. For her all too human cruelty I would call her pathetic. She trailed across the sand like some alcoholic tenant at a resort. The father arrived, smaller by a fart, and like a spider, rubbed his elbows and knees together, saying My sexual energy is high. He was laughing so I laughed and got paid again. The children wondered who owned the eggs on the stove while they starved.

I had in my possession a band of foundlings, with round faces, brown as flan, and the smell of chickens in their feathery skin. My joy sang in my fingertips at both the saw and the stove. I could hold, in this sixty inch frame, a tribe of free souls. I had forgotten, though, that I was south when I was and north when I was. Every bountiful place seemed to be an interval in a meaningless galaxy.

I've caused you so much trouble, darling, darkling, troubadour. Bite something rotten and you've got the essence of dreams, she told them. *Do you apologize to cats when you push them off the chair? I bet you do. The borderland is a fairy place, so don't be afraid when the barns thunder with trampling and strangling, when the wooden infanta grows a nose as long as Pinocchio's. I value nothing more than your voices,* she continued saying. *Like a flight of birds from an empty brown hood outside a little hermitage, a deluge of candles wobbles in your breath.*

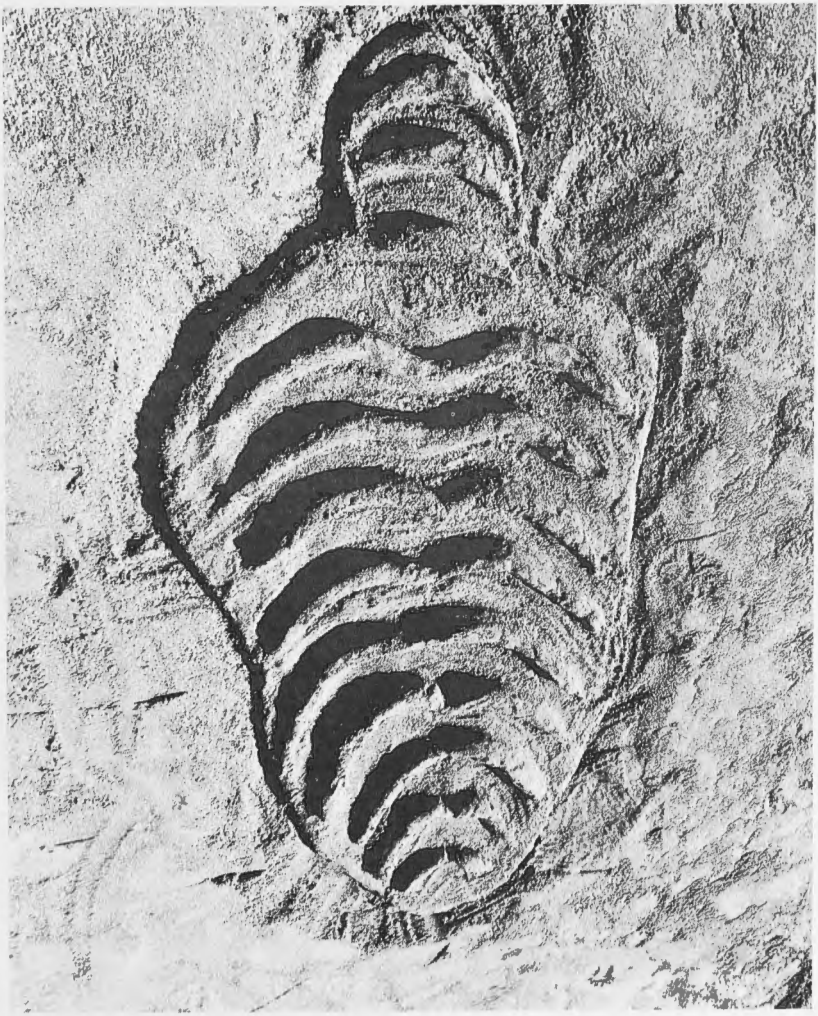
Twelve little faces turned to hear her. She wanted only to take care of them, to unfold them joint by joint until they could rise each day, eyes dark with joy knowing the hand of love would return and never forget them.

That was, however, never to be my vocation. An error on the part of my compass, or an act of predestiny? I'll never know. Hands are still the physical parts which give me the most delight. Look at them next time. I was given the charge of a disagreeable hag, instead of children, a woman who considered herself superior, and a bunch of white people, of which I was one, crawling here and there useless as mushrooms or ushers in a dark theater. I kept an orange tree instead of a compass inside my cell in Soledad in order to give me a sense of color in eternity. D—th of course is the winner since we have to pass through it to escape it. But my reason for being here didn't end up there, I'm happy to say. Through circumstance and prayer, I am learning to love my enemy.

ANA MENDIETA

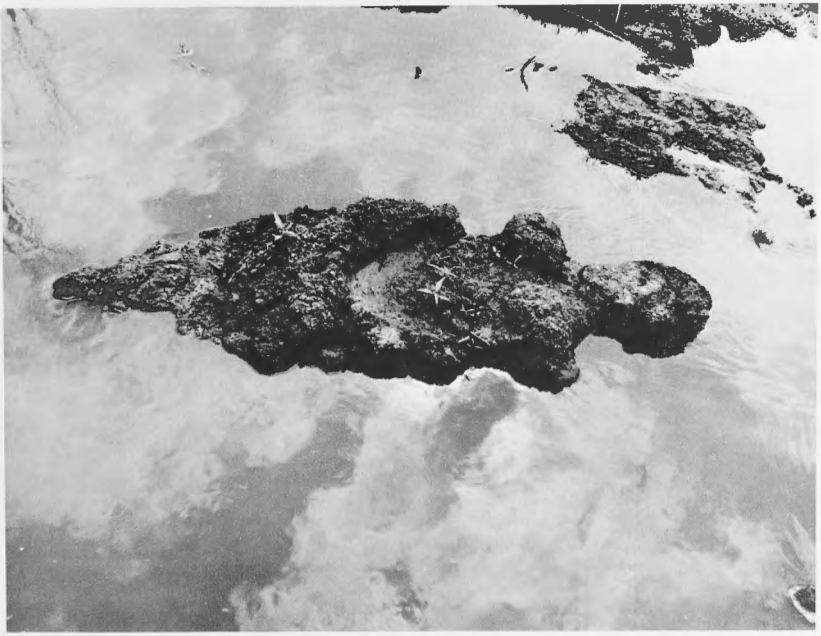
EIGHT EARTHWORKS

#1: SILUETA SERIES, 1979
Earth-body Work

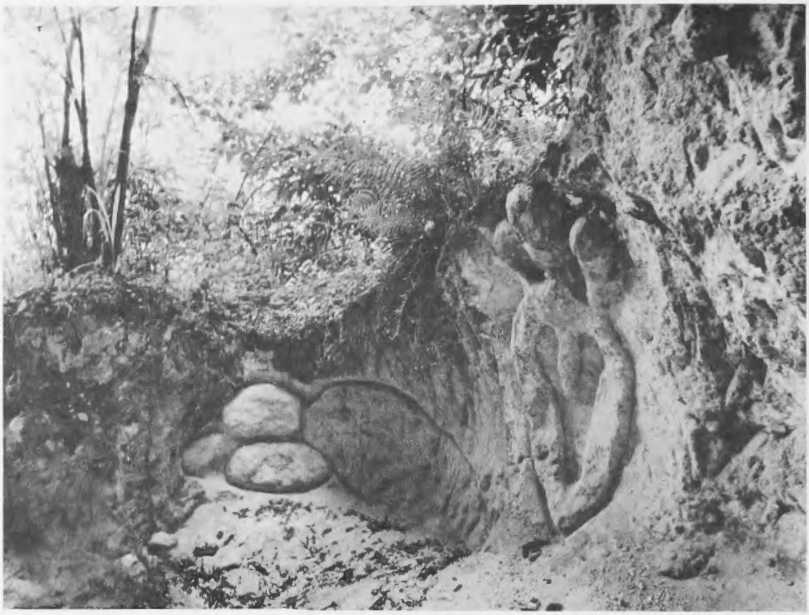


#2: RUPESTRIAN SCULPTURE, 1981
Carved cave wall, Cueva del Aguila,
Havana, Cuba

#3: SILUETA SERIES, 1979
Mud Silueta, Sharon Center, Iowa



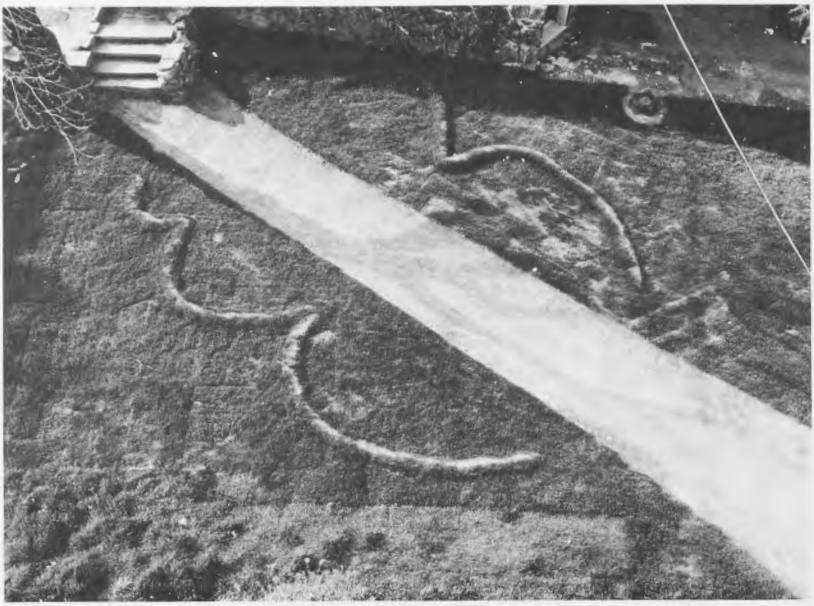
#4: SILUETA SERIES, 1979
Mud Silueta, Sharon Center, Iowa



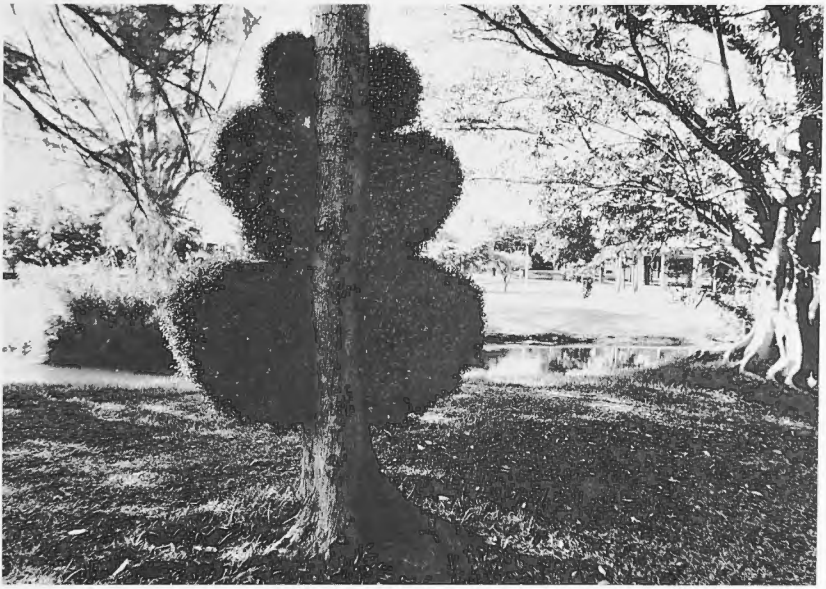
#5: GUANBESEX (left) and GUANAROCA (right), 1981

Rupestrian Sculpture

#6: SILUETA SERIES, 1979
Earth-body Work



#7: TITLE UNKNOWN, circa 1982
(perhaps a variation on #8)



#8: ARBOL DE LA VIDA/
MOTHER OF ALL THINGS, 1982
wire mesh, spaghnum moss and plants

"EARTH FROM CUBA, SAND FROM VARADERO"

A TRIBUTE TO ANA MENDIETA

(Edited by Clayton & Caryl Eshleman)

Nancy Spero introduced us to the work of Ana Mendieta in 1980, when I began *Sulfur*. Spero had appeared on the cover of my first magazine, *Caterpillar,* in the fall of 1967, and for several reasons it seemed appropriate to use one of Ana's earthworks on the cover of *Sulfur* #1 (spring, 1981).

Ana died in the late summer of 1985 and like others who knew her and admired her art, we became increasingly vexed by the fact that her husband, Carl Andre, who seemed to be involved in her destruction, had not been brought to trial. Not only had Ana left us, but her work and our memory of it and her, seemed to be disappearing through the lack of response to her death with the possibility that what had happened would simply be forgotten.

In the winter of 1987, I spoke with Nancy Spero and discovered that there was a concerned support group which met regularly to discuss the future of Ana's memory and her work. So, with the help of Nancy, John Yau, and Raquel Harrington (Ana's sister), I contacted around thirty people with something to say for this tribute. Many of those contacted did contribute and it has been a moving experience for us to assemble all of these pieces at this time.

For those who missed Ana's retrospective at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, a catalog is still available for $12.00. Write directly to the Museum at 583 Broadway, New York, NY 10012 if you want to order one.

—CE

ANA MENDIETA (1948-1985)

Ana Mendieta was born in Havana, Cuba. After the Bay of Pigs invasion, when she was 13, she was sent by her parents to the United States to shield her from social turmoil and a Castro education (her father was in prison, accused of being a C.I.A. agent). She and her older sister were placed in an orphanage and then in various foster homes—in the state of Iowa. She learned English and adapted as best she could to a definitely non-Latin world, becoming a citizen in 1970.

Drawn to art, she eventually earned a Bachelor of Arts (1969) and then a Master of Arts (1972) from the University of Iowa. Although her graduate degree was in painting, much of her study was focused in the Multimedia and Video Art program under Hans Breder, where she was exposed to the most recent developments in art. Trips to Mexico, where she made and documented many mostly ephemeral outdoor sculptures, were at least partially motivated by a need to explore her Latin American heritage.

A grant from the Iowa Arts Council in 1976 made it possible for her to move to New York City, where she pursued Hispanic and art world contacts. In 1979 she had her first New York one-person exhibition at the all-women A.I.R. gallery. In 1980 she visited Cuba and subsequently was instrumental in bringing many artists and critics to her native country. During her second visit she executed a number of important rock-carvings under government sponsorship.

Mendieta received numerous honors for her art: fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, the Guggenheim Foundation. In 1984, she was chosen for the Award in the Visual Arts (Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art). In 1983 she became a fellow of the American Academy in Rome. Delighted with Rome and at long last culturally at home, she had apparently decided to live there permanently.

Mendieta married the sculptor Carl Andre in 1985 but eight months later in New York City was found dead on a rooftop 34

stories beneath the window of her husband's high-rise apartment. On February 11, 1988, Justice Alvin Schlesinger of the New York State Supreme Court declared that Carl Andre was not guilty of murdering his wife, because "The defendant's guilt was not proven beyond a reasonable doubt."

As an artist, Mendieta was more than promising, more than emerging. She successfully created a synthesis of Performance Art, Body Art and Earth Art and in the process created her own language. What were the components of this language? In early performance works and films her material was her own body; later her body was the template for earth/body silhouettes made of rock, branches, flowers, mud, or inscribed by ignited gunpowder. As she progressed, archaic female fertility forms became the essential and magical images—in rock-carvings, floorpieces, leaf-drawings, and tree-trunk sculptures (her last works).

Perceiving herself as in exile, Mendieta used her art to heal herself, thus provoking and perhaps healing others. The ritual-like process of artmaking she employed was influenced by Santeria, the Afro-Cuban religion she studied. She explored cultural as well as feminist issues; more correctly, she explored human issues: What is our relationship to earth and what can be called the female principle? What is our relationship to nature and to the gods? Mendieta disproved the notion that a woman and an Hispanic cannot produce important art. She was political, she was passionate, and she was enormously talented. She is gone, but her work remains: many now should ponder the rude beauty of her art.

NEREYDA GARCIA-FERRAZ

AN INTERVIEW WITH RAQUEL (KAKI) MENDIETA

(Edited by Kate Horsfield)

The following text is from a transcript of an interview with Raquel (Kaki) Mendieta, a cousin of Ana Mendieta, who teaches Cuban history and culture at the Superior Institute of Art in Havana. This interview along with many others was made with friends and family of Ana Mendieta in Cuba and the United States for the purpose of making ***Ana Mendieta: Fuego de Tierra,***** a videotape on her life and work. The transcript was done by Alejandro Velasco.*

It was my association with the history of the culture, and with the art scene in Havana, that led Ana and myself to develop a very close relationship during all her trips back to Cuba. We had some mutual personal experiences, and at the same time we had professional interests that, although they weren't similar, they complemented each other. In order to talk about Ana's work, in my opinion, to understand Ana's work you also have to know what Ana's background was like.

I was two years younger than she was, so my memories of her are the images of a child younger than a somewhat older cousin. But I do remember very clearly the impression I had as a child of

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* ***Ana Mendieta: Fuego de Tierra***
50 minutes 1987
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Ana's personality. She was a kind of child leader, one who would gather others around herself, and who would make the decisions. She was older than my brother and myself, and among the younger cousins she was the person who would have the last word. Yes, she had a very strong character, and if not temperamental, she could be aggressive, but all that combined with a charm, something that in Spanish you would call "to have an angel."

I always remember her here at the beach in Varadero, because Varadero was the center of the maternal family. And since Ana's father and my father were two brothers married to two cousins, then the paternal and maternal sides of the family were together in this same world around Varadero. It somehow represents also the history of the family, and our world of games as children.

The house in Varadero was of special significance for the family. I remember that when Ana was a child they used to come to the house, what we called "the old house" to spend the summer vacations and Christmas. The "old house" was a founding house, the first house built in Varadero in the second half of the 19th century. The house has a beautiful history because it is associated not only with the background of the family, but also with the history of the struggles for the independence of Cuba.

The house was a symbol of family reunions. The whole family came—Ana's grandmother, grandfather, the children of these grandparents, and their children—which would be Ana's generation. And we used to live separately, because my grandfather and grandmother had in turn built another house here in Varadero, but we used to visit the old house very frequently, almost every evening. The family had grown very large. There were some who lived in Camaguey, others in Havana, and in Cardenas. So everybody would meet again here. The house became so important that even its birthdays were celebrated. And that was very funny, because the different sides of the family would bring gifts to the house. Some would bring dishware, others would give sets of glasses, others sofas. I think the house got to be 80 years old. It was a huge house, it had eleven rooms. There was a tower on one end which faced the street. One could go directly from the gate to the yard, and from the yard directly to the sand beach. It was surrounded by pine trees, and we used to play a lot of games around this garden. And all of this linked together, I mean, going

from the dirt to the sand, from the sand to the dirt, from the house to the beach, and from the beach to the house and into the water.

And we used to revolve around this world, around the world of sand, and water. And I think that all this found its way into Ana's work, that's why I emphasize it. The games with sand were an essential component. We used to have competitions to see who made the most beautiful castles, the biggest ones, the most imaginative ones. There was one game we enjoyed a lot, it was burying someone. You know, we used to lie down and get covered with sand. Then our bodies would kind of grow huge, and only the head would stick out from the sand, and then hands were added to these bodies. Very often Ana would make shapes on top of these bodies. I remember sometimes it was very lush women, with huge breasts that made us laugh. And then sometimes we would lie flat floating in the water, so that the sunlight would reach to our "campanillas" (uvulas) because supposedly letting the sunlight into your mouth was good for preventing a cold. So all the kids would lie flat heads up, floating along for about five or ten minutes, letting the sunlight into their mouths. And it is peculiar how those are the images that have to do with the silhouettes in Ana's series. The shape of the body in the water could somehow be the children floating in the water, or children lying down on the sand, those bodies drawn or shaped in the sand. I think all the elements and symbology that Ana subsequently used in her series of silhouettes is very much interwoven with the world of Varadero.

All this is also very much tied up with Cardenas. Cardenas is a city near Varadero, and it's where Ana's grandparents used to live. Cardenas had a very special meaning for Ana because just as one remembers the images of childhood, Cardenas also had the charm of the imagery. Her grandparents' house in Cardenas was also a very large house dating from the 19th century. It had a lower level and when one entered the house it had a garage, where the horsedrawn carts used to be parked. Then there was a foyer. Ana's grandfather was a physician, and in the lower level of the house he had his private practice, where his patients used to go in the evening for consultation.

The house had a central patio, and there were some huge kitchens in the back. There was a sort of mysterious feeling around the place. The big library in the lower level had some dark

spaces and many twists and turns. The house had a mezzanine, that is, a small level between the lower level and the upper level, which is typical of 19th century Cuba. Then there was a large staircase with something like 75 steps. So you had to climb a lot of steps before you reached the actual living quarters. The living-room was huge with marvelous glass cabinets filled with the most incredible things: from the tooth of a giant shark, a *"carcharadon carcharius"*, to minute porcelain objects. They were the fascination of all the children that used to go to Ana's grandparents' house.

In Cardenas too, and related to this marvelous world of the house of Cardenas was the museum of Cardenas, which I think that for all the children of at least two generations was something very important. Why? The museum was closely tied to the family because it was founded by a great-grand uncle, a brother of our great-grandfather. And it was a very special museum, one of the first museums founded in Cuba. His idea of what a museum could be was very special, it would seem that a child had made it. But a child that also loved beautiful and interesting things, and the history of things. We would go to the museum when we were children, and the first thing we'd rush to see was this marvelous thing: a flea circus with dressed-up fleas. And next to those fleas were some other extraordinary things, such as the death mask of Maximo Gomez, and the ship that Maceo used to cross the trail from Jucaro to Moron. One could also find a stuffed lioness, or a marvelous collection of Cuban snails, which was then the largest in Cuba, and also a very valuable collection of Roman coins. And next to this, somewhat to the left, in a central patio, there was a living alligator. The museum was completely absurd. I don't think I've ever known a museum with the fascination of that old Museum of Cardenas. Museums today are very rational: with perfect lighting, everything well organized, but cold and distant. You never got that feeling in the Museum of Cardenas, which almost had the marvelous fascination of a fair. But a fair which was part of your family history, and also the history of your country and of the foundation of the nation.

Ana's maternal grandmother was one of the daughters of General Carlos Maria de Rojas, the Chief of Brigada Cardenas, during the 1895 to 1898 War—the War of Independence. When the war ended, Brigada Cardenas, the troops of the Liberation

Army that operated in this area were supposed to go into town to be received by all the people of Cardenas who had just been liberated from the Spaniards. But they had to come first to Varadero, to the old house, because the troops were almost naked. The "mambises" had been fighting for nearly three years, and they had nothing to wear. So they had to be dressed up so that they could go by ship, across the southern coast of Varadero, through the Bahia de Cardenas, into Cardenas, to be received by the liberated city.

Ana's maternal grandmother, Elvira, played a very important role. She always kept the patriotic traditions of the family and she represented the world that linked the history of the family to the history of the nation. And she was the honorary president of the War Veterans. All of us children used to remember how there were days of the week when Aunt Elvira would receive guests. And the veterans used to go see her with much honor, with much courtesy, because she was the one daughter of General Rojas who continued to live in Cardenas.

As children, there was one thing related to the war veterans that used to be particularly fascinating to us, it was one veteran who had been slashed with a machete during the war. His name was Colonel Casimayu. I knew him when he was a very old man. He had numerous machete scars in his back. He had been slashed with a machete in a fight between Cubans and Spaniards, and thought to be dead, he had been left behind on the battlefield. When he came to consciousness again, a scabby vulture was picking at him, as if he were one more casualty of the battle. When he got up, his hand was hanging from a piece of skin, and he himself cut it off with a machete. In the stub where his hand was missing he used to wear a leather attachment. When he walked into the room everybody looked awestruck at him. But it was a blend of awe and pride for the legend the man was, that made one breathe the very living air of history. And that was very impressive.

That was Ana's world as a child from which she took her roots and the history of both sides of her family, her nationality and culture.

Then the period of the insurrection sprang up, prior to the Triumph of the Revolution, and I think all Cubans unanimously supported the armed struggle directed by Fidel. I remember that Ana used to be very proud because her saint's day, Santa Ana was

July 26, and she always spoke of her saint's day as something very important, as though it linked her even more to what was happening—to the extraordinary event that the whole world admired, a new war of liberation. A totally tyrannical government was being rejected by the Cuban people. And the insurrectional stage of the Revolution was supported by the general population, by all social classes. At that time the family was unanimously a Revolutionary family. The problems began afterwards, when things began to change.

At that point began the contradictions typical of a Revolution. Class contradictions. Well, we came from a bourgeois family and we had to make a class jump, so to speak, we had to break away from a classist background, and incorporate ourselves into the revolution. Ana's family did not do it, and very quickly they drifted towards a position against the Revolution. That started from the outset, from the first few years of the Revolution. I think the Catholic Church had much to do in this. In other words, the Church as an institution was used as a weapon by the counter-revolution to try and break up the triumphant revolution. And our family was—mainly on Ana's mother's side, a very Catholic family. They were very Catholic, and the Church had much influence on them. There was a campaign called the "patria potestad" (parent authority) campaign. It was essentially organized by the Catholic Church, which had strong ties to the counter-revolutionary campaign of the North American Government. This campaign would allege that the Revolution and communism wanted to take children away from their parents, to take away their authority, the rights parents have regarding the education of their children. The families which had strong ties to the Church (especially some families in the city of Cardenas) decided to send their children to the United States.

All the tensions around the political positions caused the family to rip apart. In other words, we became divided into those who were revolutionary, and those who weren't. I believe this was a decisive factor in Ana's life, because it meant not only the breaking up of the family, but breaking away from history, from a cultural tradition. And that was essentially an overall uprooting process all at once. You know, Ana was thirteen years old, at a very critical age, and all of a sudden her world changed almost entirely.

So Ana disappeared from our world, even when she hadn't yet left. There were family tensions around these different political opinions, so we sort of stopped visiting each other. I cannot clearly recall that time in images, but I am aware that the family distanced itself, and that was the first rupture.

Sometimes I would not see Ana for months, and I remember that when I saw her once she had changed very much. You know, I had remembered a tremendously revolutionary Ana, euphoric over the triumph of the Revolution, at the level of a child, right? We would play "rebels," we wanted to have olive green clothes made for us, to dress ourselves with the uniform of Fidel's army. And all of a sudden we became distanced, and I didn't understand why we weren't seeing each other. It seemed to me to be some sort of process that was happening among the grown-ups, and that its impact on children was only that we saw less of each other. But when she and her sister, Raquel, were sent to the United States we were not even aware that they were going. We weren't even told, because we were the revolutionary side of the family.

When Ana came back to Cuba after many years, it was partly to search for her background. But it wasn't only the background she was looking for, but also those in her family who were responsible for all that had happened. She came back to Cardenas on that first trip and she spent about a week with her grandparents—both were still living at the time. (They died after Ana had made several trips to Cuba.) She told me she had long conversations with her grandmother, whom she loved, trying to recover her background because it all involved a very strange confusion of feelings. On the one hand she was attempting to recover her background through the history of the family, of the country, and the cultural tradition, but at the same time she was angry at her grandmother, who represented the rupture she had been forced to make from that history and the family.

That first trip was, above all, of a tremendous intensity, because, you know, when she would walk down a street, it was as if she were reliving or reclaiming something that many times she thought she'd probably lost forever. She went to the Museum of Cardenas, but the museum wasn't the same anymore. She would rummage through her grandmother's house remembering things that had already been erased from her memory, small details: the

glass cabinets, the objects inside the cabinets, the rooms, how to climb the stairs. I don't know, it was something strange, like learning, like when a child learns to walk, but is was like learning step by step how to live again a life that had already been lived in a different way. She went back to where the old house used to be in Varadero to try to recall things. But the old house was demolished at the beginning of the Revolution and the wood was used to build schools. The property where the old house used to be is now a park where the whole floating population goes when they come to Varadero on weekends, or for one day to swim in the sea. Some areas still remained the same, the trees and the walkway to the house were still as they had been. She said she had walked down that path, and stood under the date tree, and she went where the pine trees of the old house used to be. And she did all that with anxiety, with an urgency to recall.

It is my impression that Ana developed her work in silhouettes because they represented her body being integrated into nature. The silhouette is a shape that may be very symbolic, but, at the same time, it is a very direct way of expressing what she was lacking. Nature was the direct contact with something she had lost and was trying to recover.

She was trying to recover her essence, that is, those elements in nature that were essential to her. She was living in a world that was alien to her history, her roots, her culture, so nature was the closest she could get to it by means of the color and the texture of the elements.

Well, for Ana, who was an artist, these things were expressed essentially through creation. I mean, along with this intense need to be in Cuba and live in its history, there was the need to create in Cuba. That is why she was insistent on establishing the right conditions and ties, through the Ministry of Culture, to work in Cuba. The sculptures done in the Jaruco Mountains outside of Havana were perhaps some of the most significant moments of artistic accomplishment in her career.

And I believe she had a very deep awareness of her culture. I had given her many of my lecture notes on Cuban culture, and I found that in her notes she had things that were taken from those lectures, and you could tell she had studied the concepts of a syncretic culture, the transculturation process in Cuba. And sometimes she worked with elements of color, and flowers, in a way

that had to do with African rituals, or were of an African origin typical of the African cultures of Cuba. And it was very interesting how she started to play around with all these elements which belonged essentially to the Cuban culture and reflected the intense syncretic process of transculturation of which we are a product. And she was working with elements that come from her experiences as a child, her experiences in Cuba, with sand, water, flowers, earth and grass.

I don't think it is a coincidence, for instance, that when she left Cuba the first time in 1980, she took—and this was something that was forbidden, she had to hide it—earth from Cuba and sand from Varadero. Those were the two things she took back from her first trip. Later on she used to tell how she kept them in her apartment in New York as one of the most important things she had in her life, that is, earth from Cuba and sand from Varadero.

LINDA MONTANO

AN INTERVIEW WITH ANA MENDIETA

Linda Montano: In your work. . .you embody the earth, become it, leave your impression on it. Can you remember an instance from your past that may have encouraged you to leave images of yourself on the earth?

Ana Mendieta: I came from a tropical country (Cuba) and I have pictures of myself, 7 months old, crawling around on the sandy beach. We had a house there and I would be outside from 7:30 a.m. to 2 in the afternoon. . .out in the water and the sand. I learned about my body from doing that. Now I continue to use my

body to communicate with the world so that things that I have learned are things which I have experienced and internalized. I'm 5 feet tall so that I even measure things with my body. I started doing imprints to place myself and my body in the world. That way I can do something, step away from it and see myself there afterwards.

LM: Why did you begin doing imprints?

AM: I came to this country from Cuba when I was 12. I was sent by my parents after the Cuban revolution but they stayed there so that my sister and I were alone, without speaking English, having been placed in a Catholic orphanage run by nuns in Iowa. It was a very devastating experience because I felt alienated and totally misplaced. . .a culture shock. America is a multi-colored society but I came from a place where everyone was alike. So when I got to Iowa and finally learned the language and talked to other people, I found that we would look at the same event, talk about it and would both see it totally differently. It's then that I realized that I lived in a little world inside my head. It wasn't that being different was bad, it's just that I had never realized that people were different. So trying to find a place in the earth and trying to define myself came from that experience of discovering differences.

I had been a painter and worked always with one image but I gave up painting because it wasn't real enough. In 1973 I did my first piece in an Aztec tomb that was covered with weeds and grasses. . .that growth reminded me of time. I bought flowers at the market, lay in the tomb and was covered with white flowers. The analogy was that I was covered by time and history.

LM: Do you feel that there is Catholic imagery in your work?

AM: I was raised a Catholic and can't deny my heritage. I like very much the idea of history and I admit that the Catholic religion has made a rich cultural contribution to the world (they've also destroyed a lot of things). So when I first started working this way I felt a very strong Catholic connection but as I've continued to work I feel closer to the Neolithic. Now I believe in water, air and earth. They are all deities. They also speak. I am connected with

the goddess of sweet water (this has been her year and it is raining a lot). Those are the things that are powerful and important. I don't know why people have gotten away from these ideas.

LM: How important is your site?

AM: It's crucial. There are many places that I've gone to time and time again just because I feel connected to them but if I'm working in a city that I don't know, I usually drive around until I find a place that I can respond to.

When I find the site I have things that I do there. . .work rituals. For example, I wear comfortable clothing, I have special tools and insist on working alone. I have recently realized that nobody can make art when listening to rock and roll and vice-versa. I cannot be distracted. . .I need privacy because I claim territory somewhat like a dog pissing on the ground. Doing that charges the whole area for me.

LM: Are you using death/burial images consciously?

AM: I don't think that you can separate death and life. All of my work is about those 2 things. . .it's about Eros and life/death. In 1976 I made an image out of sand and stuck pieces of wood in it . . .it was a fetish piece. That summer my mother had a cancer operation and I didn't consciously set out to help her, I just did the piece, but I think it was connected to death imagery.

LM: Did you perform ritualistic acts as a young person?

AM: We had a little chapel in our house and I used to play priest all of the time. I would tie a half slip around my neck, ring bells and act out all of the ceremonies in Latin because I had memorized them in church.

LM: What does your work teach you?

AM: The work continues to teach me everything. It has always been ahead of me and I learn what it is about years later. Work makes me strong. . .it defines me.

LM: The work has two elements. . .it is very poetically sacred but also has an edge of the profane. . .the dog pissing to mark territory. That makes for a realistic balance.

AM: The beauty of anyone that we might consider sacred is that they are also human. I'm glad that I was raised in my culture because we learned not to believe the one side, the sacred side, even though it's taught to us. I had no problem shedding all of that holy stuff. The interesting thing is that education is about uneducating yourself. . .always. . . .It's not about getting something but getting it and then dropping it. We spend the rest of our lives doing that.

LM: Was anyone in your family a healer? Did you have access to that kind of information in Cuba?

AM: No, my family was against anything like that. It was considered to be low class and an activity of the uneducated. However, I became interested in these things after I had been working that way for a while and I found that my work shares a lot of healing imagery. I have used gunpowder in pieces and later found that in certain rituals the Santeros (healers in Cuba) make 5 piles of gunpowder, light them and if they burn it means yes to the question and if they don't burn, it means no.

I also did an interesting piece that crosses the line between art and life. The Santeros use a tree which in Spanish is called a sela and in English is called a cotton silkwood tree. It has very long roots that stick out. In Miami there is a tree like that which the Santeros have claimed and the people do things to that tree when a healer tells them that they have to make a sacrifice. When I was there I decided to do a piece on the tree. I was in the Cuban section and collected human hair from the different beauty shops so I knew that it was Cuban hair. Then I made an image of a figure on the tree. A root was sticking out so the figure appeared to be either a male or a female being screwed. There were also 3 knots on it that looked like female genitalia so I surrounded them with hair that I glued on. It's amazing how Elmer's glue withstands weather because I did it in 1981 and it's still there. The last time I saw the tree, the people had added coconuts, chicken wings, all kinds of offerings. For a while they put a figure of Santa Barbara

underneath it, cut an opening in what would be the face and stuck a shell in the mouth. They have really activated the image and claimed it as their own.

LM: What are you thinking about now?

AM: I have been given a beautiful studio in Rome. I have never had a studio before because I have never needed one. Now I have been working indoors. I've always had problems with that idea because I don't feel that I can emulate nature. Installation is a fake art. So I've given this problem to myself. . .to work indoors. . .I found a way and am involved right now, working with sand, with earth, mixing it with a binder, and making sculptures. I am very pleased because I am able to get the same kind of textures that I get outside. I was working and working and not sure if anything was there and then one day I came into the studio and saw that the sculptures had a real presence. All of them have a "charge" in them. A friend of mine brought me sand from Egypt and so one of them has an "Egyptian charge." Each one is different.

Now that I am in Rome, I was able to go to Malta, a tiny island in the Mediterranean where the oldest Neolithic temples are located. Their culture was matriarchal and based on the image of a sexless fat woman. She isn't like the Venus of Willendorf. . .this one had a skirt on and is sleeping. One theory states that she is from a cult of sleeping and death.

The temples of Malta are shaped like this big fat woman and there was one that was carved out of a cave with red spirals painted on the ceiling. I went into it and felt as if I were in a big womb. That's really what art is about. . .it binds us historically.

ANA MENDIETA

A SELECTION OF STATEMENTS AND NOTES

The turning point in my art was in 1972, when I realized that my paintings were not real enough for what I wanted the image to convey—and by real I mean I wanted my images to have power, to be magic.

I decided that for the images to have magic qualities I had to work directly with nature. I had to go to the source of life, to mother earth.

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My *Silueta Series* is an ongoing dialogue between me and nature (1973). It is a search to find my place, my context in nature.

My heritage has been extremely decisive in my art. Using my body as reference in the creation of these works, I am able to transcend myself in a voluntary submersion and total identification with nature. This insistence of communion with nature has to do with reaffirming my ties with my homeland, as well as my identification with the spirits of my ancestors and my ancestors' identification with the land itself. Through my art I want to express the immediacy of life and the eternity of nature.

The making of these works is not the final stage of a ritual but a way of asserting my emotional ties with the earth as well as conceptualizing nature. The color photographs are a way of capturing the spirit of the work, since the actual sculptures left on sites are eventually reclaimed by the earth.

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Pain of Cuba
body I am
my orphanhood I live.

In Cuba when you die
the earth that covers us
Speaks.

But here,
covered by the earth whose prisoner I am
I feel death palpitating underneath
the earth.

And so,
as my whole being is filled with want of Cuba
I go on to make my mark upon the earth.
To go on is victory.

June 1, 1981

*

For the last 12 years I have been carrying on a dialogue between the landscape and the female body. Having been torn from my homeland (Cuba) during my adolescence I am overwhelmed by the feeling of having been cast out of the womb (Nature).

My art is the way I re-establish the bonds that unite me to the Universe. It is a return to the maternal source. Through the making of earth/body works I become one with the earth. It is like being encompassed by nature, an after-image of the original shelter within the womb.

The works are made dialectically in response to the particulars of a landscape. All the sculptures are human scale, thus visualizing the body as an extension of nature and nature as an extension of the body. This obsessive act of reasserting my ties with the earth is an objectification of my existence.

The works recall prehistoric beliefs of an omnipresent female force whose body parts made the earth a living creature. In essence my works are the reactivation of primeval beliefs at work within the human psyche.

1982

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My art is grounded in the belief in one universal energy which runs through everything from insect to man, from man to spectre, from spectre to plant, from plant to galaxy.

My works are the irrigation veins of this universal fluid. Through them ascend the ancestral sap, the original beliefs, the primordial accumulations, the unconscious thoughts that animate the world.

There is no past to redeem: there is the void, the orphanhood, the unbaptized earth of the beginning, the time that from within the earth looks upon us. There is above all the search for origin.

1983

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There is an African ritual which I think deals with the same ideas I explore in my art:

"When a native brings back a wife from Kimberly, they carry with them a little dirt from her homeland. Every day she eats a little of this dirt to accustom herself to the change of residency" (Lucien Lévy-Bruhl: *La mentalité primitive,* Paris, 1922).

In a sense that is what I am doing here.

By making my image in nature I can deal with the two cultures. My earth-body sculptures are not the final stage of a ritual but a way and a means of asserting my emotional ties with nature and conceptualizing religion and culture.

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The Black Venus

Around 1817, when Spanish colonists first set foot on Cay Loco—a key off the south coast of Cuba near the city of Cienfuegos—they found a sole inhabitant. She was a young black woman, nude except for a necklace and bracelets of seeds and seashells, and so lovely that "the most demanding artist would have considered her an example of perfect feminine beauty." She

was a survivor of innumerable generations of Siboney Indians, who had been extinguished by colonization. They called her the Black Venus.

At the sight of the Spaniards, she ran—from fear rather than from modesty. They caught her and discovered she was mute. Living alone on Cay Loco, she was accompanied everywhere by a white dove and a blue heron. Spreading their wings, they would touch her mouth with their beaks in silent caress.

When one of the colonists took her home with him, gave her food and clothing, he expected her to please him, to work for him in return. But taken from her island freedom and unable to speak, she nestled in a corner, refusing to get up, work or eat. Finally, alarmed at the prospect of her death by starvation, the colonists took her back to Cay Loco to live in freedom.

From time to time over the years, the citizens of Cienfuegos tried to "civilize" the Black Venus. But each time her passive protests forced them to return her to the key, where she reigned in solitude with the blue heron and the white dove—her only subjects.

The historian Pedro Modesto recalled that when he was a child, around 1876, an old black woman, with hair like a huge white powder puff and naked except for a blue, red and white necklace, secretly entered his house. She refused clothing and was dressed only by physical force. She refused all the food offered her except for native products—yucca, bananas, and sweet potatoes. The next morning she had disappeared, leaving the clothes behind. This was the last time she was seen.

Today the Black Venus has become a legendary symbol against slavery. She represents the affirmation of a free and natural being who refused to be colonized.

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La Jungla

A work consisting of 7 tree trunks (redwood) varying from 8 to 10 feet in height, each tree trunk being from 25 to 50 inches in diameter. The tree trunks are to be kiln-dry for permanency. They will be installed in the triangular patch of grass on the Wilshire

Boulevard part of MacArthur Park (across from Otis Institute). They will be set up in Relationship to each other charging the space with tenseness.

Each tree trunk will have an image carved/burned into it representing the 7 powers of life (that rule the jungle). The trunks will be installed with a cement base (that will not be visible) making the installation stable and safe.

1985 [her last project]

HANS BREDER

ANA MENDIETA: IMPRINTS / STUDENT YEARS 1972-1977

An awareness of an artist's student years always illuminates our understanding of their subsequent work. This is especially true when trying to understand a career as tragically brief as Ana Mendieta's.

Ana began graduate studies in painting at the University of Iowa's School of Art and Art History in 1969. It was an auspicious moment. In 1970, a progressive administration allowed me to establish the first university level Multimedia and Video Art program. A major Rockefeller Foundation Grant helped to establish The Center for the New Performing Arts. It was an exhilarating period during which we pioneered the nurture of the avant-garde arts within a university environment. Many of the most significant conceptual/performance artists of the era spent time in Iowa City —Hans Haake and Alan Kaprow were among the first visitors;

This piece was originally intended for the "Reminiscence" section of the exhibition catalogue, *Ana Mendieta: A Retrospective*, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York.

Robert Wilson, in residency for a semester in 1970, developed *Deafman Glance;* Vito Acconci, Willoughby Sharp, Nam June Paik, Mary Beth Edelson, Mac Adams, Lucy Lippard and others had an impact on the art community. It was a remarkably fertile atmosphere.

In this atmosphere, Ana's work exploded off the canvas. She received her MA degree in painting in 1972 and entered the Multimedia and Video Art program. During the next five years, until she received her MFA degree in 1977, she passionately formulated and pursued her vision—nurtured and influenced by the experimental environment here but also thoroughly moved by her Cuban roots—always attempting to explore and express the powers of the primitive.

I have countless memories of the experience of Ana's work during this period—work that existed most powerfully in the moment. What we have now is documentation, traces of those moments during which she attempted, in her words, "to become one with the earth."

I remember when she was first inspired to do a piece which set the stage for the Silueta series of the next decade. It is 1972—a sunny, humid afternoon, typical of Iowa in the early fall. A group of my students visit my studio. Among them is Ana Mendieta. The smell of freshly cut grass is hanging in the air. Spontaneously, Ana announces that she has an idea for a piece. She undresses, lies on the lawn, and asks one of the students to cover her body with grass. Somebody takes photographs. In the photographs her body blends into the ground. From that point, she blended her body with the elements in innumerable ways.

Ana spreads fertilizer in an outline of her body on a freshly cut lawn. In time, the grass in the area that she has fertilized grows stronger and darker.

At Old Man's Creek in Iowa City, she burns the outline of her body into the ground with gunpowder.

During this time, each summer, I took students to Oaxaca, Mexico. It is one morning in 1976, as we are planning to visit Yaagul, a Zapotec site in the valley of Oaxaca, Ana asks me to drive her first to the market to buy flowers. She tells me she has an idea for a piece. This is a site that we had visited many times. We walk up to one of the open tombs. She lays in it, nude, and asks

me to arrange the flowers around her body, instructing me that the flowers should seem to grow from her body.

She has a *cohetero* (maker of fireworks) in a *colonia* district of Oaxaca make a firework piece in the shape of the outline of her body. One evening, at dusk, we ignite it and watch her form consumed by fire.

In the fall of 1977 Ana has a branding iron fabricated in the sculpture studio at Iowa—a duplicate of her hand. She asks me to trace the outline of her body on the lawn in the back of my house. Then she heats the branding iron on my gas burner and burns imprints of her hand into the drawn outline.

My final image of Ana from this particular chapter of her life is later that fall in 1977. She is leaving for New York City to begin life in the art world there—climbing aboard a Greyhound bus with her branding iron under her arm.

Iowa City, June 1987

LUCY R. LIPPARD

Trying to sort out a kaleidoscope of sharp and soft, shattered memories of Ana since 1971, when I met her at a party in Iowa City, after I'd given a lecture, after which she gave me a lecture, told me the story of her life. I was fascinated, and later pleased, when she sent slides, to find that her work was equally compelling.

We became friends, she moved to New York, and I watched Ana's art mature as her nostalgia for a fantasy childhood in Cuba changed to active support and eventually participation in the revolutionary process. She was our tour leader on her second trip back, in January 1981. Like a little kid taking friends home to meet the family, she was caught between pride and anxiety that we or

they would find fault or behave badly. The next time she returned, she worked in the caves of Jaruca, going back much further into a communal past. When we were in Cuba together, we got some video footage of Ana on the Malecon, for a collaborative tape we were going to make about the effect of politics on three generations of women: Ana's aristocratic grandmother, who stayed and lived in Cuba; Ana's mother, a professor of physics and chemistry, who sent her children to the USA and soon followed; and Ana herself, the artist whose life reflected the contradictions and whose art was a cultural integration. (We never made the tape because our grant proposal was turned down.)

When Ana first went to Rome, she came over with a shopping bag and announced with a flourish that she wanted me to keep her "revolutionary soul" while she was gone. It was a matte black clay pot with a hammer and sickle painted in dark red on the side. I was touched, and kind of amused. I had it on my desk. One day, months later, I was talking on the phone and suddenly the pot emitted a single violent puff of smoke. I was startled, moved it away from my desk, thinking that maybe Ana had kept her gunpowder in it and some sort of spontaneous combustion had occurred. (She used gunpowder for some drawings and for at least one of the *silueta* earthworks.) When she came back to New York next, I told her about this rather occult emanation. She smiled mysteriously and said of course these things happen. She also said she had never kept gunpowder in the pot.

When Ana died, I waited for a signal from her revolutionary soul. Now I keep a pale gray feather in the pot.

I always loved the explosive side of Ana—the irrational, often unreasonable, sometimes infuriating part of her that understood aspects of the inexplicable and was capable of both political and spiritual passion. Of the photo/*silueta* pieces she gave me, my two favorites have always been the one where she lies naked and faceless in an ancient Mexican grave, covered with tiny white flowers, and the one where she is resurrected in fireworks, arms raised triumphantly like an ancient goddess.

ROBERT RODALE

NICE WORK

"That's where I want to work. Over there in those rocks."

Ana pointed to an old limestone quarry, partly filled with water. No one was allowed in. A locked fence surrounded the whole property. My challenge was to get Ana through that fence.

Here is how we came to be working together on her latest art project. I am a farmer, sort of. Really a farm researcher and publisher of magazines, some about farming and gardening. I love the land. More than that, I feel the spirit and reality of regeneration in the land, and I try to find many practical uses for that spirit.

On the walls of my office I put pictures of land. One day in a 57th street NYC gallery I saw one of Ana's works. At first I saw only a large photo of a road cut, Just rough soil and small rocks.

My type of person took that picture, I thought. Someone else likes to look inside dirt and see a spirit there.

Then my eyes focused on the human form cut into the dirt. And I saw that a big root ran right through the head and down out the toes. It was for me a great moment in gallery going. I was blown away, to use a cliché. Sold! I said to the gallery person. And please tell me where to find the artist.

A short time later my wife Ardie and I were having lunch with Ana somewhere downtown. She was the age of our own daughters and sons. All of ours are artists. So we had a family feeling in common, plus the interest in getting under the skin of the earth. Ana talked for a few hours, telling us the story of her life.

"Please come to our farm," I said to Ana. "It is a beautiful place with nice round hills, only two hours west of New York. There's an old stone house, empty most of the time, where you can stay. I'll pick you up at the bus in Wescosville."

My goal was to get her to work in our own earth, perhaps on one of those hills. The Indians left many stone arrowheads, which our son Anthony finds. I wanted also to feel the presence of one of Ana's figures.

Her schedule was busy. But after a number of months she agreed to come. I was driving her from the bus stop to the farm

when she spotted the quarry. The farm didn't have a chance. I think she was more of a rock person than a topsoil person anyway. Those walls of grey stone and rubble were her medium of choice that day, anyway.

Getting her in was no cinch. There's deep water in the quarry. The cement company that gave the quarry to the county prohibited public access. But I pulled strings for three days and finally got her a key. She worked in there for three or four days.

Carl Andre visited her one day. We had given Ana a car, and she picked him up at the bus stop. Although he was dressed more like a farmer than me—wearing bib overalls—he didn't like the country. Made him nervous, Ana said. We had a nice visit in the kitchen, he gave me some of his books, then he left.

On the last day I went into the quarry with Ana to see her work. Right by a path leading into the water she had carved a reclining figure into a wall of rather loose rock. It was much like the figure in the work that my wife and I own.

Did I appreciate what she had done? Not nearly enough. I was busy then, and had just used much of a week to get her in and out of the quarry. I was glad she had done something that satisfied her. But sorry that our farm hadn't inspired her more.

Ana was pleased most by someone's addition to her work. There were others going into that quarry. Fishermen would crawl under the fence and go down to the water. Ana never saw them, but on the last day, when she went back to take a photo, someone had arranged stones under her carving to spell out:

"Nice work."

EDUARDO COSTA

I have before me a letter and some postcards that Ana sent to me from different places. Rome, Florence, Malta, Egypt and even

New York City. She was always happy when traveling and very affectionate. The cards are thoughtfully chosen and bear extensive reflections on her trips and career, plus greetings. She always calls me "hermano" and sometimes "hermanito."

Ana liked to bring into our conversation intelligent or witty things she would hear around. She was always careful to indicate the source, whether it was someone I knew or not, just as a matter of intellectual honesty (not to take credit for someone else's line). Ana was smiling one day as she told me that she had called Lucy Lippard to inform her that she had got still another grant. What made her smile was that Lucy had said "Well, aren't you leaving anything for your old age?"

Ana knew how to choose and give a present. Because my wardrobe was quite slim, she showed up one day with a present of clothing. It was a white cotton pair of pants, simply cut, very wearable and appropriate for the summertime. Ana had found the pants in the street, in an area of Soho where she had found clothes for herself before. I tried them on and liked them immediately. They had the right color and texture, and the fit was perfect. When she left I had the feeling that I had been given something wonderful.

The other present Ana gave me is also a found object, although "assisted" by the artist. It is the full shell of a huge horseshoe crab that she found on a Jersey beach. She decorated it preciously with opening and closing Spanish interrogation marks and a number of expertly arranged silver and gold lines which frame the bilingual legend "A chuchazo from Villas, New Jersey." As she explained to me a "chuchazo" is the blow of a whip in colloquial Cuban Spanish, and horseshoe crabs have a tail that reminded her of a whip. She loved the object and understandably so since its natural design, front and back, would make you think right away of some basic patterns in her work. The present was dedicated to me because I had related before some of the shapes of her art to different natural formations. I had for instance pointed out a couple of trees on Washington Square which feature natural scars very much like her images in the 'Silueta' series. I liked to call them "found Mendietas."

Ana did not like to miss a chance of socializing with her friends. She was a friend of John Perreault whom she also liked to credit with introducing her to the newest art developments

through his courses at the University of Iowa. Ana was always glad to meet with him and vice-versa. About three weeks before her death I invited her to dinner, together with Jeff Weinstein and John. Both John and Jeff had visited her in Rome and Ana had proven a good hostess, showing Rome to them, taking them to the right restaurants and so on. We all were looking forward to seeing each other. But Ana was not able to make it to dinner. That same evening her husband was coming to New York and she preferred to stay home with him. Nevertheless she phoned at the last minute to say that she would like to come over just to say hello. Since we were neighbours, she managed to make some time to see us after picking up The New York Times for her husband.

Ana did not cook frequently, but when she did it was wonderful. At one point she wanted to meet Scott Burton who had been one of the jurors who gave her the Prix de Rome (another juror was Robert Motherwell and I think there was a third). Scott also wanted to meet her because he, as well as Motherwell, had liked her work very much. Ana asked me to invite Scott to dinner at her place. There she cooked her well-known chiles. Those were an exquisite meal, a simple dish made with very basic ingredients and with a delightful taste. One important aspect: the seeds of the chiles were not removed. When the greenish, perfectly cooked flesh melted in your mouth, the texture and flavor were substantially different (I believe her work, like her chiles, keeps an essential component that most artists discard). Ana and Scott got to know each other that night. Although they did not meet frequently afterwards, at the time of her death Scott called me from England where he was very busy with his show at the Tate. I still have the message he left on my answering machine (I have kept the cassette because Ana's voice is also there). On the tape Scott sounds really upset. "Eduardo," he says, "This is Scott, calling from London. I knew about Ana. . .How sad. . .How sad. . ."

Ana knew a lot of people and liked quite a few of them. Some of these were art people who had been helpful or had charming personalities. She liked for instance Nancy Spero and Leon Golub. She respected them as artists and they had invited her to their place many times since she came to Manhattan. Ana was grateful and glad that Golub was doing well, but worried that Spero would not get enough press or have the right gallery. I think it was after Lucy Lippard's article about Nancy in the *Voice* that her career

took off again and Ana was genuinely relieved. She was also concerned that my career seemed to have come to an indefinite halt after a moment of splendor many years ago and I did not seem to care about it. She was the first person to talk to me about the Ivonne Seguy Gallery (which had sold some work of hers). Ivonne Seguy later became the Terne Gallery and I ended up being one of their artists.

Ana was small, vibrant and very real. Except for her voice she did not have much physical strength, but she was full of life and plans for the future. Also she knew that her work was going to be extraordinary and the best was still to come. Although critical of our economic system she believed in America's spirit as a force that would survive Capitalism. She believed also that some kind of American dream would come true for her, especially if she was accepted first in Europe.

As an artist Ana was most interesting. Her pieces had a way of illustrating her unusual biography and psyche that was quite extraordinary. At work she was a prehistoric figure whose playing with nature was recorded many years later by the American tourist in possession of all her gadgets. Her "theme" happens through time, which is a difference between her work and that of the other earth artists. Ana was primeval in her approach, techniques and aesthetics when she was working the earth, but she would become contemporary and technological at the time of dealing with the camera and prints. I find this very interesting. There is much food for the mind here. She was in love with the earth and also with laboratories and Minoltas but the nature of these two passions came from a very remote time in history in the first case and from a very recent time in the second case. Probably because her work was about a decade ahead of her time, Ana felt viewers were not understanding her "paintings." She decided then to make her work more available to the established perception of the art world. I would need more space and time that I have to reflect on her changing awareness of the realities of the art world and on the diversity of our dialogue at that time, which helped her find the direction of her most recent pieces.

LOWERY STOKES SIMS

ANA MENDIETA: A REMINISCENCE

I got to know Ana Mendieta about a year or two before she first left for Italy on the Prix de Rome. It was a time when she was going to Cuba and taking groups of artists with her. Ana nagged me about going to Cuba because she knew of my interest in the Cuban Surrealist painter Wifredo Lam. The timing of the trips she escorted never seemed to coincide with my work schedule, so Ana would act as my advance woman telling artists in Cuba about me and my interest in Lam. She would also bring back literature on Lam that was otherwise unavailable here. When I finally got to go to Cuba in 1983 as a participant in a symposium dedicated to the work of Wifredo Lam, Ana deemed it the fulfillment of destiny. Then she got the news of the Prix de Rome. At the farewell party at Ted Victoria's I encountered Julian Pretto, and we spent the entire evening marveling on Ana's spectacular champagne-pink sequined evening dress. It was a side of Ana that she rarely showed to the art world.

In the inimitable way that friendships fare in New York, I got to know Ana better after she left for Rome. When she came back into town we would make a point to get together and catch up with one another over some semblance of an Italian meal. Again I met more people, and learned about others Ana felt I should meet. The intervals between appearances were punctuated by the postcards that served to keep Ana's public abreast of various events and developments in her life and career. Signed with the ironic nom de plume, "Tropic-Ana," they conveyed Ana's ideas and feelings about myriad things: her art, whom she had met, where she had been, what she had seen, and most of all how much she enjoyed being in Rome. She had often talked to me about the cultural dislocation she felt in this country. This was one of the reasons that she gave for spending so much time in Italy after the Prix de Rome year had expired. She felt more at home in that Mediterranean environment.

Indeed the time and space afforded her in Rome were quite beneficial to her art. She devised a way to accommodate her in-

herently environmental and site-specific works in a gallery setting. This development seemed to be particularly momentous, and she had many questions about its viability. The question of location of a venue for this work was also deemed to be crucial in view of the demands that her body of work made in terms of space and ambiance.

MARSHA PELS

Ana Mendieta was a rare, visionary creature; a hands-on sculptor with a highly developed political awareness, social conscience and a fire burning in her hands. She worked directly; equally primal and cerebral with concepts and materials others freeze and suck the life out of. Ana had an uncanny aesthetic ability to breathe life into whatever she touched. The range within her work was extraordinary for its intensity of feeling and solidity of purpose. Unfortunately, the tragedy of her death will taint the purity of her reputation but we were the same age and I believe she was the most innovative sculptor of her generation. For Ana was a groundbreaker. She had no role model: she was her own role model.

She was my personal connection to an understanding of Minimalism for which I am grateful; to a deeper level of transformation of matter where nothing is sacred. To Ana it was all the same. Sculpture had no formal restraints or meaningless rules. And though she chose mostly natural materials and elements with which to work, I believe her strength of purpose and her vision of herself and her work within the real world pulled her through her work voraciously and viscerally connected to whatever material or concept she at that present moment was embracing. Her immediate decisions were as valid as her entire working process.

Ana taught me things I am still trying to hang onto in the shadow of her death. She was such an active presence that it is difficult still not to think of her as alive because of her enjoyment of life, her spontaneous combustion and her celebratory nature. Her presence gave new sincerity to the myth of artists' identity, new force to my belief in the historical progression of the sculptural process and continued belief in the power of the sculptural object.

We met in Rome and in Rome Ana was at home; the history and beauty of the city, the passionate nature of the streets and the people allowed her a natural freedom of expression and lifestyle which she demanded of any environment. Rome allowed her to explode, in an odd way, without calling unnecessary attention to herself. It was filled with volatile sensations and impulses. And yet for all her sophistication, Ana was an innocent. There was a child-like naivete and sheer juvenile delight she expressed but rarely showed beyond the tough exterior. And it was this delight, this sheer joy which made Rome her natural, dramatic habitat.

Ana believed she could do anything against all odds. I remember once she called me to her studio frantically because she was having problems with her chain saw. Now it was extremely disconcerting to watch a woman of Ana's size with a chain saw of Ana's size. I remember screaming at her my chain saw riot act. But Ana had no handicaps. Scale and size were tremendous issues in her work. She was able to create monumental or tiny sculptures with a sensitivity that was enviable. I believe Ana was an enormous woman stuck within a small body. Her spirit was gargantuan; her hands and feet tiny. Her world had no bounds.

I can hear her saying behind me, "To hell with everybody, who cares what they think." But deep down she desperately cared about it all. Though she demanded to be heard, she needed to be understood. And this sometimes created a dilemma, for her work perhaps was the only thing she could totally control. Yet she believed she could control anything if she set her mind to it.

So underneath the shield of her will, lay the complex fabric of her vulnerability, which through her integrity reflected the world at large in conflict with the world of Ana. Ana Mendieta was a survivor, but she was only human. She craved attention, love, respect and trust like any other human being. And she needed to be

protected, despite the infamous tough exterior. Her work somehow perfectly balanced this psychological dynamic within the formal rigor of a truth SHE KNEW COULD EXIST within the rest of her life.

And this is what she was struggling to reach and maintain. She was trying to find that truth; that impossible place where one can be always on the edge but safe at the same time, in order to fight to continue to grow.

*

It is difficult for me to talk about all of Ana's oeuvre, as we only spoke in the present about the present and future work. We were very close through Sept. 1984 - Sept. 1985, when I was in Rome at the American Academy on a Prix de Rome in Sculpture the year after Ana. Much of our intimacy came from the uniqueness of our shared experience, but also stemmed from our mutual respect we found stimulating through our differences. When I now look back and try to understand why we got so close so fast and had such a good working studio relationship, to some degree it was my honesty in criticizing her which made Ana pursue me. Ana was extremely selective and yet she was lonely for a working comrade. She had undergone a tremendous series of revelations in Rome and she believed only someone else who also experienced this could understand her.

In the summer of 1985 Ana was planning her most ambitious outdoor sculpture to date, which she was to build in California in late 1985/early 1986. Since her most recent work had involved tree logs; working crudely with a chain saw and then delicately with hand tools—the California pieces were a continuation in process and image. She transformed these wooden hunks into actual physical presences combining man and nature, beauty and beast. Into these free-standing tree personas, she hollowed and etched with ignited gunpowder an equally disarming silhouette; a shadowy figure reminiscent of the Munch scream which acted as full modeled form and flat drawing at the same time. She created an enormous amount of space, perceptually and actually within the dynamic of this black drawing on the tree-grounds or wooden horizons. They were strange negative voids and powerful swollen

protrusions at once. With the actual size of these logs up-ended (5' - 7'), they, of course, took on anthropomorphic overtones, but what was most interesting to me about these sculptures, which had backs, fronts and sides, was the unique kind of displacement of space that happened as you walked around them.

Frontally perceived, they were standard figure/ground as you saw the shadowy drawn smaller figure within the larger molded shape, but as you walked around them and the shadow disappeared you were back into real space (not the space of the sculpture), almost as if you had traveled a great distance. You moved into and around the sculpture as it itself moved inside itself. It was not static, but swirling and eerily alive. And to me this was an enormous breakthrough for Ana.

These pieces which she created in the spring and summer of 1985 (and were almost working models for the upcoming installation in California) were more three-dimensional in a traditional sense than any of her other work. I was not fond of her recent cracked earth floor pieces. I called them cookies and she was aware of my disdain. Though I loved her earlier site-specific earthworks in dirt, earth and rock (which unfortunately I had only seen reproduced in photographs), I persisted in criticizing these cookies not even as high relief, but as simple, unexpansive quasi-minimalistic relics. I called her flat. She called me flat (ironically, all I did that year was bronze wall-reliefs) and we argued.

Because as we all know, Ana loved to argue. And if she had to defend her work, her values, her principles past mere happenstance, only then did one really get to know how viscerally connected she was as an artist and a human being. So we decided the earth was round, but Rome was flat. We would drive to the Colosseum and call it illusionary flat. Bernini was rounded flat. All flat hills led to Rome. In fact, Ana claimed Stella really knew that Caravaggio was really flat. And so we had our little sculptural joke.

Meanwhile, I cannot tell you how exciting it is to walk into an artist's studio and feel they have really made a breakthrough. And I remember my joy in the late spring of 1985 when I first saw these log pieces of Ana's. They were knockouts. We discussed how she wanted them to act independently and yet within a relationship to each other; not as a series, but as an interdependent progression. The sculpture for California would have been spectacular. She

was going out there to handpick a group of 7'-12' indigenous redwoods.

We discussed technical problems as well as aesthetic ones: particularly the expansion in size and relationship to hand workmanship, the problems she was still having with the chain saw as a tool (was there another way?), the peculiarities of the site, how to secure them to be safe but look like they were growing out of the ground and her apprehension about working away from her beloved studio in Rome for a month. She was not sure whether her Italian assistant would be able to make the journey abroad to help her in the States and since she felt disconnected from the so-called "scene" in New York, I promised I would set her up with a good assistant when she came to New York City in early September.

I was waiting outside of her apartment with this guy the afternoon after her death wondering why on earth she was keeping us waiting. . . .

It is the work she never had a chance to complete that I felt closest to. It captured her enormous presence with a real sculptural maturity, her visionary ability which now was not only universal, but international, her physical ambition and visceral connection to transform her material and all her hopes and fears for the future.

Those California logs might rival Stonehenge and Ana was not one bit afraid to live up to this.

October 1, 1987
Bennington, Vermont

AL NODAL

Today I sit here with Ana's picture, and with one of her Banyan-leaf drawings withered on my wall. I spoke to Ana her last afternoon alive. We were talking about the logistics of a project we were working on together. She was worried about having to ship her large wood carvings from Rome to LA, and when we finally worked out the details of having her Italian mastercarver come here to do the work on-site she was greatly relieved. The last thing she said to me was that I had provided her with a "spiritual uplifting" by solving the shipping problem. Those were her last words. I received a letter from her two days after I found out about her death with a detailed list of things to be accomplished. She had written the letter after she got off the phone with me. The letter was full of life and full of plans for the future. She was on the threshold of a brilliant mid-career.

I met Ana in New York City in 1978. I read an article on her in the *Village Voice* that cast her in a darkly mysterious and exotic light. I was fascinated with her. The night I met her she showed up at a bar in the Village with a friend. I thought she was going to be tough and demanding but she turned out to be very sweet and bubbling with potential and ideas. I was struck by how immediately we became friends and cohorts.

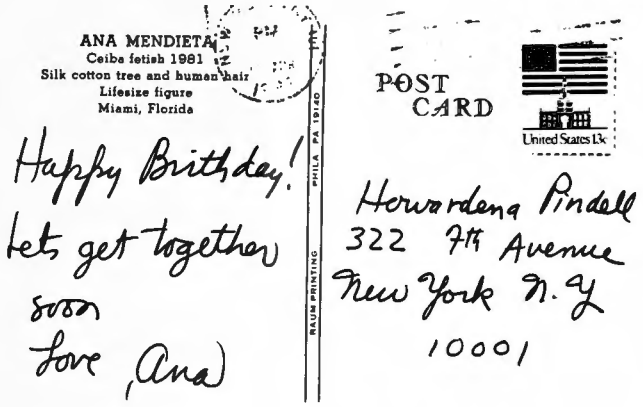
She came to Washington shortly thereafter and became part of the family at the Washington Project for the Arts. In 1980 she came back to DC to do a *silueta* out of sod on a Georgetown cemetery overlooking Wisconsin Avenue. She seemed more mature and a little tougher, but also outrageous and funny, with a biting attitude regarding feminism which she bantered along with Joy Silverman, Olivia George and other WPA staff members assisting the project. She had come down for the weekend to do her piece and we were braced for a weekend of hard work. However, the piece turned out to be amazingly simple. Ana did it all by herself and wouldn't let us help. She sort of whipped it up magically. We all ended up picnicking and laying around the cemetery all afternoon.

In 1984 I was again privileged to involve Ana in a project for the MacArthur Park Public Art Program in Los Angeles. Ana was

very responsive and made significant contributions to the planning process by advocating the needs of the area's children and of the transient Cuban and Black communities. She quickly got to know all of the Cuban *santeria* shops which border the park. She also preferred a Cuban dive in the toughest corner as her lunch and dinner spot. Although it is the best Cuban restaurant in LA, it caters to the roughest bunch of drifters and to the terrifying Cuban "Marielito" residents of the County-voucher Hotel Ferraro. Sometimes during dinner we felt as if we might soon catch a knife in the back or a flying bullet. There were arguments and fights going on all the time. However, the people there loved Ana. She would settle arguments and get free dinners all the time. In a way, the owners adopted her as their artist, and do they need her now! Her work would have been an important source of support for the Cuban and Black members of the neighborhood. It would have given them hope and a sense of the spiritual that is severely lacking in this environment.

Her project for MacArthur Park was entitled "La Jungla." It was to consist of seven large tree trunks, carved and burned, representing the seven powers of life ("which rule the jungle"). The trunks were to be placed in a grove of pine trees on a slight incline facing the park bandshell, and arranged in such a way as to "charge" the enclosed space. The piece would have provided just the right amount of other-worldliness to the park.

1987



No matter where she was in the world, Ana always remembered my birthday, even when I cared not to remember. Of all the artists I knew, she never tried to use me to advance her career. She never even asked me for a recommendation or would press me about coming to a show or an opening. We shared a view about the white feminists and how callous many of them were toward women of color, content themselves—once the doors opened a bit—to be in all white galleries. The trial is on now—but as before, back at the time of her death, there is that awful silence radiating from the "art world" as if veiling a threat that if you speak out you wipe out your chances of showing your work forever. . .fear and silence. . .denial and silence.

. . .and I think of Ana writing all those postcards each year as my birthday deepened traces of wrinkles across my face. And I think of the last time I saw her, when she and Andre took me out for a birthday dinner. And that night I vowed never to see them again because I was terrified of something that I sensed and could not crystallize into exact words. . .the last time I experienced that contraction of feeling was when I was in what could have been a

fatal accident when there was no time for terminal euphoria. My own recent injuries had left me too fragile that evening to push away the dread and not flee. . .and today I see some of the white feminists weeping for Ana high on being able to capture a woman of color in the marron focus of us as victims even their "white god" has deserted. . .and I see them inert through their tears failing to lift a finger for living women artists of color who are censored out of the closed, restricted "art world."

RAQUEL MENDIETA HARRINGTON

A nuestra Madre Universal, la inspiración de Ana,
cuya gracia es la cura de todo.

To our Universal Mother, Ana's inspiration,
whose grace is all-healing.

A nuestra madre, quien me ha confiado el
cuidado de las obras de Ana.

To our mother, who has entrusted me with
the care of Ana's works.

A Ani:

There is silence between us. . .
Yet, what use are words
when our hearts are now *one.*

And thus nothing can divide us.
Neither exile, nor destiny,
not death itself.

I bear always
that burning print of your silhouette:
indelible track of your yearning for union with
the All.

1987

NANCY SPERO

Ana Mendieta's art is implacable, an investigation of the body, her body, five feet tall, melding with nature. The earth, trees, blood, fire—the basics were shaped into the female form. The variations and repetitions of this singular subject became in her hands an all-consuming, elemental force.

Ana was direct and outspoken, eschewing art world fads. She found her workplace essentially out-of-doors, often in remote, isolated sites, carving in rock, digging in the land, covering herself with earth and leaves, setting fire to the gunpowder-spread trenches of her earth sculptures.

I miss Ana, her companionship, her vitality and drive, her pride and her anger. Her art is unique and powerful, and she was a unique and brilliant artist.

New York City
July 31, 1987

JOHN PERREAULT

ANALOG

for Ana Mendieta

I

ANA 1 : up : upward (*ana*bolism). 2 : back : backward (*ana*tropous).

Ana ever upward
Ana flying

Back to earth
Ana dead

The hard earth has no mercy
Wonderful earth
earth beneath our feet

To burn her body into the sky
To burn her body into the earth

Ana separated from her shadow
Ana leaving her shadow behind

My shadow
Your shadow
Our shadow

Does it matter
if I am not a woman?
Does it matter
if she was not a man?

Somewhere in Cuba
in a cave
she joined with nature,
mother of us all.
But where is the father?

II

ANAbaptism 2 : the baptism previously baptized.

Darker than
Speaking another language
Smaller than
Shorter than
Louder than
More beautiful than
Speaking another language

Why is it the mother tongue
and not the father tongue?

Did God take her own beauty
too seriously?

Ana and the saints.
Ana and the African gods.

And are there therefore
gods too close to us,
that foolishly allow us
to summon them
but then make us
their foaming horses?

Speaking through us
she speaks to us,
the ancestress,
clothed in blue and white,
wrapped in blood.

She will protect us.
But you cannot do it alone.
You cannot do it alone.

III

ANAbasis 1 : a going or marching up : ADVANCE, *esp.* : a military advance.

Ana conquering the art world
Ana conquering Rome
Ana conquering exile
Ana conquering resistance

She came to Iowa
and she met this one and that one
and was converted.

She came to New York
and she met this one and that one
and she was converted.

Where is she now?

Only her shadows remain,
only her art.

IV

ANAchronism 1: an error in chronology; *esp.* : a chronological misplacing of persons, events, objects, or customs in regard to each other 2 : a person or a thing that is chronologically out of place; *esp.* : one from a former age that is incongruous in the present

Ana so out of fashion
she was ahead of her time.
Primal Ana,
Ana of the earth.

V

ANAdem a wreath for the head : GARLAND

In dreams
we see her with tropical flowers,
tiny orchids
in her shiny black hair.

She is wearing a shiny and tight
very red dress.

Porcini, where are the
porcini?

Where is Tamayo?

Tropicana roars through Rome
in her car

searching for porcini
rather than Puccini.

VI

ANAgenesis evolutionary change involving a continuous succession of forms replacing one another without branching

Running along the shore
with white feathers,
she plunges into the surf,
floats,
letting gentle waves
wash the feathers away.

Bird, woman,
priestess.

VII

ANAglyph a sculptured, chased, or embossed ornament worked in low relief

Mystery signs
in the cave on the cliff.
Signs in the mind.
Pictures becoming language,
language becoming pictures,
both resisting the other.

Woman signs,
womb signs,
signs of sex.
Contraphallic
power signs,
taunting male gods,
courting the female.

Healing signs
and healing shapes,
the fire and smoke
of ancient rite.

VIII

ANAgogy interpretation of a word, passage, or text (as of Scripture or poetry) that finds beyond the literal, allegorical and moral senses a fourth and ultimate spiritual or mystical sense

The girl child sent
to a place without shores;
to protect and destroy.
Puberty equals exile.

But then the journey home
from island to island,
from cave to cave.

Oh, Ana, what island
have you returned to now?
Or do you—I hope not—
wander
seeking some terrible revenge?

May you be at peace
in the homeland you sought
May you be safe in the arms
of the Great Mother.

IX

ANAgram 1 : a word or phrase made by transposing the letters of another word or phrase 2 : a game in which words are formed by rearranging the letters of other words or by arranging letters taken (as from a stock of cards or blocks) at random

Eat manna,
die.

And I eat
name.

Eat, I am
an end.

I, a meat,
an end.

X

ANAlogical 1 : of, relating to, or based on analogy 2 : expressing or implying analogy

Earth is to mother
as fire is to father.
Cave is to mother
as tree is to father.
But this is not exactly
what we mean.

Art is to life
as death is to death.
But this is not exactly
what we mean.

1988

MIRA SCHOR

"What can you say about a twenty-five-year-old girl who died?"

Erich Segal *(Love Story)*

Ana Mendieta was two months shy of her 37th birthday the night she died. My reflections on the retrospective of her work at the New Museum of Contemporary Art are colored by the knowledge that when she died she was the age that I am now, and by my awareness of the similarity of our interest in developing a female form in its relationship to nature, and, further, of those art roots we share in the rich mixture of feminism and the anti-commodificative tendencies of earth, performance, and process art characteristic of the early 70s. These self-reflexive echoes heighten my sense of the unfairness of her being judged by the standard of oeuvres of dead artists, instead of the less reverent ones applied to young, living and developing artists. Although her career was illuminated by flares of brilliance, the imposition of *oeuvre* on *work* is experienced as a sharp injustice. An effort must be made to do her the favor of retaining her work a little longer within the hustle and controversy of contemporary art discussions.

Mendieta's work is dedicated to an earth "Goddess:" giant breasts and buttocks, spiralling wombs, slits, labia shaped like hearts, vulvae abound within rock, trees, leaves, and the earth itself. Her assertion of the bond between her body and that of Mother Earth reveals an enviable simplicity yet a problematic lack of ambivalence which seems a relic of the first years of feminist art. The unity of her identification with Nature is the source of her work's most vivid images yet also the site of its weaknesses.

Mendieta's work separates into three phases: performance pieces where her own body or its image interact with earth, blood and fire (The Fireworks Silhouette series, Fetish series, Tree of Life series, Silhouette series—1976-1977), the Rupestrian sculptures (1981) in which a more exaggerated paleolithic female archetype is carved into stone caves in Cuba, and the more traditional art

objects in which similar figures appear in drawings and sculptures of wood and earth (1981-1985).

Mendieta's subject in the early pieces, visible only through photographic and filmic documentation, is woman as traditionally understood as Nature to man's Culture. Although Mendieta's actions upon sand, earth and stone are dramatically direct and her images archetypal, as art these pieces (the Silhouettes and the Rupestrian sculptures) reveal layers of intervention, impermanence, distance, vulnerability and remoteness. As artist she functions as Culture to Nature's nature, reinscribing woman as hole and cave onto the cervix of the actual stone caves of her (Mother) land of birth, Cuba. Whether carving a female spoor into limestone, or entombing her own body or its replica in blood, sand and mud (woman as matter encased within itself), or searing her shadow onto the earth, she interacts with the image and the material in a way which enriches the connotations of her work. The interrupted synapses between the permanence of the stone carvings, the vulnerability of the female image imprisoned in them, and the remoteness of their cave matrixes enhance the sense of loss which is associated with the body of the Mother. We sense her physical intimacy with her work, yet our only contact is through ethnographic photographs and grainy, rather spooky home movies, doubling our personal separation from the Mat(t)er. We are as distanced from the actual presence of these earth pieces as we are from Nature, Mother, the Imaginary.

Mendieta's action upon the earth and the subsequent separation from/or destruction of the action leavens her archetypes with a welcome ambiguity. Nature's actual *matter,* and the temporality of performance provide a crucial *resistance* to her generic "Venuses." Also, because of their presentation in time, and position in geographic space, these images may be icons and fetishes, but not talismans that can be carried about and traded in the market. Thus the commodification of woman (and art) is averted.

Mendieta's later works exist in our presence. Drawings on bark paper, giant mud cookies presented flat on the ground, tree trunks altered to include and represent the female body, leaves burned onto shield like planks stand close to us, they are our size and art size, the scale of traditional drawing and sculpture. Fresh and clean in shape and design, the later works are visually attractive and exciting artifacts. The Tree Trunks of 1985 are particularly

successful in the clarity of their concept and execution. These pieces look very good—but the important dialectic layers of mediation and resistance present in the complex artist/material, audience/work interactions characteristic of the earlier works are lost. The vulvae, leaves, spirals stand without counterpoint, Nature to Nature.

The audience's interaction is similarly diminished. Imagining the act of burning a body into the earth is a more active and *activating* involvement for the viewer than seeing a brown design on wood. One is told the line was produced by burning gunpowder, but it could have been manufactured by other methods. As the method's evocative power is diminished, the image itself must carry more critical responsibility.

Despite the violence implicit in the use of gunpowder, or the sharp point of a burin into living plant tissue, there is no violence to the concept of femaleness presented. To grow, the daughter must question the Mother. She must act out her *own* sexuality, as Mendieta does do in her performance pieces, not only look to the Mother as The SEX. And it is only in the necessary questioning of what she holds dearest that an artist's work lives most fully, not in the easy acceptance of a beloved form or concept.

Recent critical theory has investigated and developed the problems of female representation. Although representations of the "nothing to be seen," posited by Freud and Lacan and commented on by French feminists such as Luce Irigaray, must be attempted by women artists, an undifferentiated allegiance to the vulval half of the basic male/female, culture/nature binary opposition that one associates with the early stages of feminism and feminist art begs rethinking and reworking. Even if the woman artist ultimately asserts her femaleness, *chooses* her difference, the choice will be all the more powerful for an intervening interaction with culture, or, simply, with doubt.

Mendieta's work surely would be shown if she were alive today. One can easily envision a show of the last works in wood and the floor pieces. But separated from their past—the documentation of the earlier works—it is possible they would succeed only insofar as they could be (mis)interpreted as postmodern *artifacts,* beautiful, sophisticated commodities. A failure to "succeed," in market terms, would only be due to the extent to which they would still be perceived as feminist *actions.* The art world does

not seem very interested in new infusions of feminist art (especially any that smack of "stage one" feminism), although such works by women who were accepted into the art world during the "window of opportunity" period of the early to mid-70s are permissible and Mendieta might qualify for this group. And yet even these women (Spero, Bourgeois, Murray, Applebroog) remain somewhat marginal to mainstream art, even as they are applauded and respected, while images by male artists which repress woman into her nature role flourish in the spotlight. And, within the development of feminist thought, the post avant-garde proposes a subtle critique of the Nature/Culture opposition, influenced by deconstructionist philosophy, Lacanian psycholinguistic theory, and cultural studies. Mendieta's "essentialism," her embrace of a female essence implicit in her generic female forms might well be criticized by contemporary feminist writers.

Mendieta's Woman, particularly in the later works, is only female, she presents a limited view of the form and experience of femininity out of the limitless possibilities of femaleness. Because dialogue and conflict do not flourish within an important portion of her work, it does not have the depth of an *oeuvre*. In Mendieta's work there are many deeply moving and rivetingly memorable images but, ultimately, the constant repetition of an unquestioned, generic (gyneric) Great Mother is deeply, and now, poignantly problematic.

CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN

HAND / HEART FOR ANA

the dreamed image sent by you
in affinity of our physical work
the archaic

blood ashes syrup on snow
crusted red rose black crystallation
heart like shapes drenched into snow
scattering ashes blood paint
my hands arms reaching across the iced surface
sequences of grasping air crystals
only later I saw the image is your hands
falling through space

the female body as psychic and ideological key
arteries which lead to pre-patriarchal junctures

intention meaning metaphor are
situated in our bodies and when the
generation of the body of work
and body of experience is a female body
then all our traditional insights
are shaped as question
are marked as questionable

our body the infinite battle ground
his power to trample burn encumber deny
throw to the winds

he is dancing in the wrong direction
you are tossed on his horns caught on his hooves
consort mate rock hewn from your vaulted chambers
son blessed with your holy fire you sparking Ana
sparkling wild you strong small arms reaching to consort
the stone pushed from your burning chamber the os
hammered opened arms opened
no no no no no
is the same in both languages

because this body as a source of creative
authority interjects a radical position
a female embodiment which is not muse
hand-maiden martyr saint goddess idol
whore madonna

an artist's body situated as prima materia
as the basis of form structure
in fluid mythic interchange

1988

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

GALACTITE

In Memory of Ana Mendieta

A great earth mother lived in her angry Cuban body
and she exercised this mother as an essential part of her appetite,
her hunger imbued woman shape into the mute anonymity of the
    earth's masculinized crust—
she dug under a Celan canopy, she dug and she dug,
with the heel of her vulva she carved and set smoking
the *silueta* grandeur of buried feminine ancientness.
Her shovel said: Laussel is, still, Willendorf, Lespuge,
tombal, severe, "earth and gunpowder" "carved clay bed"
Diana of Ephesus is exposed shale
the earth is breasted
    stone spoons,
                gala galact galacto– Gaia
                ga gaga galactite gal
            gaiety
              gaw gape g g gaylussite
        gavial gaza

as if an udderwork were excreted along this slit-shaped smoking
tumulus,
Ana in the pavement! O monstrous core of her vision,
a root twisting around the head
penetrating the reclined body,
woman attempting to slither down the firepole of herself,
to descend by and along *her* root,
by what has already run her through—

and Dionysus, "through whom they go into a trance
and speak in tongues and for whom they beat the drum,"
screwed his neck around astounded at Ana
his thick crocodilian neck, like a dark green accordion,
flexing at the very surface she walked on.

*

SHE
LOV
GOT

got it on the white garage door
got it on the pavement
got it in her skull

earth crucified
rock impounded

she swims under the tree
worm slow
worm sure

the ego? In the rage of the lived life
the id? In the ooze from the portable vessel
the snow vessel the
sulfur womb
alfawarm
wind

this Retrospective ends her Bardo

the eraser shovel

in the alchemical houseboat
300 year old men throw dice for her kidney

termite hill
  primordial clitoris

decomposing driftbitch sprinkled with red pepper flowers

calcite hag disconnecting from her driftbarge

a puddle-moated armless footless daggered clay Ana

the written-upon woman,
"in the Penile Colony," the written-
into woman, tableau of pornography

her Gargas palm
her [ ] slab

I feel space start to sing,
a Threnody meandering singing,
howl-lines, five fingers raked down
a cul-de-sac wall
at 40,000 BC,

bear-nails mammal anatomy
stretching out, pawing in
the traction of place,

elastic to time elastic space
the Earth a foetal conundrum
wombless,
but not Male

*

whose breasts are black pits
whose body bits of ash from whose vagina pink fumes
"burnt offering" on eroded ground
vines and pods her arms lifted on dune a green pubic tangle
feminine form a burned out stockade in a wasteland
flat mud arms lifted Whitman's "Lisp'd to me low the delicious word death"
the crucified bursting into fireworks Day of the Dead
green granite moss clustered breast hived the landscape redolent with vulvular force
yellowed grass surrounded by green goddess present Juno in the myriad blades
clitoris as sentinel watching over the mushroom-clustered rotting phallus of the god
violet charred remains of mother and child, Her body a swirlwork of serpent ash
the pulled open earth vulva its interior charred specks of red
long dead dangling grass over the rock shelter in which she is only a shit-colored stain her legs rivulets
"the mind is immediate, the soul very ancient"
green budded goddess stretched out on mud amidst slabs exultant/crucified in the unconscious is there
a seam between two? Crane's Nazarene/Dionysus,
at the Rorschach core life = death
the great peril in Mendieta men die ta
pulled open earth vulva swarming with pubic Medusa vines as if out of the earth slit serpent eggs ceaselessly hatching
prodigious they turn mens' eyes to battering rams
crawl hole into the rockface with shrouded head rising over
She is all hole empty shadow rubble a refuge
"ONCE, when death was mobbed,
you took shelter in me"
as if the greenery reared back to reveal the sunny dry rockface mud pustules, nodes, suggesting Her form
tall pale green grass blades through which swells a milky violet vesica piscis opaque, oily it appears like pools of smoke in surrounding blades
hill of buds tumulus covering we know not what earth pregnant nearly anonymous Ananymous Ananamend

green tufts out of brown hollows gouged halos of one who was
    and now is only as disappearance
between the legs sculpted wall clay a basin vaginally drains
    great leaky vessel the space between her bowed out bowed
    in legs
feminine form receptacle for insects air
3 headed vulva cobra guarding the keeled over rock upon rock
    breasted sleeper
I clutch the center of my being and tear
    my body a zippered pod splitting
in a tide pool two serpentine turds also reveal her
my armless outline burned into oak boles for companions
my back a labyrinth of serpents I am cut in two what remains
    forced into the rockface below all asshole this too refuge
convex head and shoulder in rockface the raised pellet of my
    belly a navel vulva a navel babe
more anonymous than Neanderthal the rubble mother with her
    rubble spout pressed between rubble thighs
The Elephant Woman afloat like an arrowhead in the skies
with a hardon rammed up through my neck into my head
    with my radish foetus gripped by the vagina my torso is
        with my staring eyeballess eyeball
Kashkaniraqmil "Somos aún, vivimos!"
    "in spite of everything we still exist, with all
        our potential for regeneration and growth!"

[September 1985-January 1988]

B. RUBY RICH

ANA MENDIETA: A POSTSCRIPT

Stories do not always end the way we'd like. Certainly not the life of Ana Mendieta. Certainly not the trial of Carl Andre. Ana's life

may have ended, with fatal prematurity, on that morning of September 8, 1985, but that moment marked a beginning as well: the beginning of another scenario to which Ana's friends and family would dedicate themselves for the next two and a half years. That was the scenario of Ana's death and its cause, and it would come to an end in a courtroom in Manhattan on February 11, 1988, when Judge Alvin Schlesinger delivered his verdict in the murder trial of Carl Andre. He decided that there was not "sufficient evidence" to convince him "beyond a reasonable doubt" that Andre had been proven guilty of her murder.

Day by day, during the meandering course of these two and a half years, those of us intent on unraveling the moment of Ana's death and bringing Carl Andre to justice (as we might have put it then) learned a lot about the nature of the legal system and the character of the art world.* Let this postscript stand as an abbreviated summary of details—just the facts, ma'am—and perhaps a hint of perspective. It has been written just days after the verdict, with the mind just beginning its long, hard climb toward resolution.

What happened on September 8, 1985, to end Ana Mendieta's life? There are a few facts. She died in the fall from the bedroom window of the 34th-floor apartment of Carl Andre, the man she'd married eight months before. Her fall occurred at 5:30 am. Andre called the 911 emergency number and reported that his wife had committed suicide. However, the rest of his call, combined with other circumstances of the death, led the District Attorney's office to arrest Andre by the end of that day and charge him with second-degree murder. A grand jury was convened and returned an indictment on two counts of second-degree murder. After a number of months of deliberation, Judge Carol Berkman overturned that indictment, indicating the admission of prejudicial testimony. A second grand jury was convened, again returning an indictment, and again Judge Berkman overturned it on similar grounds, characterizing it as a "close circumstantial case."

At this point, the Assistant District Attorney on the case, Martha Bashford, was re-assigned and replaced by Elizabeth Lederer. It was Lederer, then, who convened a third grand jury, won a third indictment—upheld this time by Judge Berkman—and proceeded

* For more on this, see my original article in the *Village Voice* (1986).

to take the case to trial. The pre-trial hearings began on January 19, during the last week of the Ana Mendieta retrospective at the New Museum, and ended with a bang Andre's attorney, Jack Hoffinger, rose at the conclusion to announce that his client refused a jury and requested a "bench" trial (i.e. decision by judge alone).

A jury would have surely included women, possibly Latinos, and inevitably makes for a more emotional case. A bench trial, on the other hand, ensures a closer legal reading, devoid of emotion, relying instead on the technical aspects of the trial presentations. A meta-trial, if you will. The minimalist's choice.

In the face of this attempt to privatize the trial, numbers of Ana's friends turned out to support her mother's daily attendance and to make the trial *real,* carrying word out into the art world and the world at large that, indeed, Andre was there in the courtroom as witness after witness testified.

Lederer stressed two points over and over: that Ana Mendieta did not commit suicide (Andre's original story) and that she didn't fall out the window accidentally (the scenario that Hoffinger constructed in his closing summation). A total of forty witnesses were called, by one side or the other. Without exception, they told of Ana's buoyant mood at the time of her death, how well her career was going, how much she loved living in Rome, what breakthroughs she was making in her work. Al Nodal testified that he had once admitted feeling suicidal to Ana and she had replied, "Eso no se hace" *(That* we don't do). Lederer, in her closing summation, enumerated all the signs present before a suicide, none of which even remotely applied to Ana. As for the "accident" theory, several different witnesses testified to Ana's fear of heights: how she wouldn't climb a scaffold to look at the Sistine Chapel ceiling, wouldn't stay at a cliffside house, wouldn't look at the view out a fifth-story window.

Lederer's process of elimination led her, finally, to review for the court the actual wording of Carl Andre's call to 911. Asked what happened, Andre replied to the 911 operator:

> "My wife is an artist, and I'm an artist, and we had a quarrel about the fact that I was more, eh, exposed to the public than she was. And she went to the bedroom, and I went after her, and she went out the window."

Lederer emphasized two points. First, that Andre was a man who used language with great precision. Second, that he thereafter altered his accounts to distance himself from this first explanation. He ultimately claimed he wasn't even in the room when her "defenestration" occurred, did not see what happened, never looked out the window nor heard the crash, but "just knew" that she had jumped out the window.

The case was an intense crash course in the legal system, as point after point of evidence was declared inadmissible, considered hearsay or prejudicial. All the testimony concerning Ana's intention to divorce Andre, for example, was excluded. Her sister Raquel wasn't allowed to testify about Ana's discovering his infidelities and gathering evidence for her divorce lawyer. Her friend Natalia Delgado, the last person to speak to Ana alive (at 12:30 that night) couldn't explain how she'd urged Ana to confront Carl to save the marriage, after Ana told her she'd still not let him know of her plans. What Natalia did say, though, was chilling. She recounted calling back late the next morning, as Ana had requested, to continue the conversation. Andre told her that Ana "wasn't there" and said, yes, he'd tell her she called. Ana, of course, was already dead.

Similarly chilling was her brother-in-law Tom Harrington's memory of how Andre had never called to tell the family of Ana's death, and how when Tom had finally called him more than a week afterward to ask "why on earth" he had never notified him, Andre answered only that he "didn't have our phone number" (which was listed and in the New York area). By contrast, he called all the friends they were supposed to have had dinner with to cancel the dates.

While Lederer relied heavily on her process-of-elimination deduction, she also had some evidence. Police and D.A. Bashford testified to scratches on Andre (which Hoffinger argued were insufficient to suggest Ana fought for her life), photographs indicated disarray in the bedroom—like an overturned chair—implying a struggle took place (Hoffinger contended Andre was just messy), and the doorman of a neighboring building testified to hearing a woman's pleading screams of "no, no, no, no, no" just before Ana's fall. In a bizarre twist of fate, the doorman turned out

to have a history of paranoid auditory hallucinations that weakened his authority in the courtroom. Nevertheless, when he revealed that his voices had always spoken in whispers and that he'd heard them only when he'd stopped his medication and hadn't heard any such voices since 1981, his testimony remained on record.

Carl Andre himself, while holding to the image of grieving widower, never even took the stand. Therefore, his character never came into question. His reputation as a volatile drunk never entered into the proceedings, while Ana's behavior when drunk was constantly discussed. Like a rape trial, it was the victim who was held up for examination. Andre's considerable reputation for violence against women, so often the subject of art-world conversation, never even surfaced. The woman artist he'd once thrown out of a moving taxicab, breaking her wrist, never came forward. Neither did the gallery owner who'd once seen him beat up a girlfriend on the sidewalk. Most of the art world never even set foot in the courtroom, let alone talked to the D.A.

And therein lies, finally, another story. Carl Andre may have been acquitted in this trial, but it was the art world itself that was decisively convicted. In addition to those already mentioned, only artist Nancy Spero and new *Artforum* editor Ida Panicelli testified in behalf of Ana, as their friend and as an artist of stature. At the end of the trial, in the aftermath of her own disappointment over the verdict, Assistant D.A. Elizabeth Lederer commented on so many artists' refusal to get involved, saying she was "taken aback and disappointed by the lack of conscience and courage in the art world."

Those of us on the periphery, the Latino and feminist and black artists and writers who shared those hard benches on the thirteenth floor, will not forget. This issue of *Sulfur* is a first step toward preserving Ana's life and work and setting the balance straight again.

GARY SNYDER

FIVE POEMS

THE BEAR MOTHER

She veils herself
  to speak of eating salmon
Teases me with
"What do you know of my ways"
And kisses me through the mountain

Through and under its layers, its
  gullies, its folds;
Her mouth full of blueberries,
We share.

Brooks Range
VIII: 86

JACKRABBIT

Jackrabbit,
Black-tailed Hare,
You by the side of the road,
Hop, stop.

Your great ears shining,
You are patient, hopper,
Watcher, listener,

I have seen that you know me;
A little. A lot more than I
Know you.

for Mts. & Rivers
V: 87

KUŠIWOQQÓ~~BI~~

[See letter at end of Snyder section]

Did it come from
The ice age lakes and streams?
Flows of liquid rock
The salt of seas,
Wind on hills for years,
This day's sun and trees?
Or this one nose?
The smell in the bark of
Jeffrey Pine.

My nose poked in the bark
Went a million years—
Sweet smell of the pine.

Delicious! Like pineapple!
What did the Piute children think of,
Smelling *Kustwoqqobi,*
What did they say?

Sun glittering on obsidian,
Wind on a hundred peaks,
Hugging a tree, smelling the bark,
I thought I heard "Kusiwoqqobi"

A soft voice from across,
From the dust, from the breeze.

VII: 82 – VII: 87 Trip with Kai down the
east side near Mammoth
Owens Valley Piute language research
courtesy of William Bright

SURROUNDED BY WILD TURKEYS

Little calls as they pass
through dry forbs and grasses
Under blue oak and gray digger pine
In the warm afternoon of the forest-fire haze;

Twenty or more, long-legged birds
all alike.

So are we, In our soft calling,
passing on through.

Our young, which trail after,

Look just like us.

4 IX: 87, for the teachings
of the wild turkey flock

RAVEN'S BEAK RIVER
AT THE END

Doab of the Tatshenshini river and the Alsek lake, a long spit of gravel, one clear day after days on the river in the rain, the glowing
sandy slopes of Castilleia blooms & little fox tracks in the moose-
print swales,
& giant scoops of dirt took out by bears around the lupine roots, at early light a rim of snowy mountains and the ice fields slanting back for miles, I find my way

To the boulders
on the gravel in the flowers
At the end of the glacier
two ravens
Sitting on a boulder
carried by the glacier
Left on the gravel
resting in the flowers
At the end of the ice age
show me the way
To a place to sit
in a hollow on a boulder
Looking east, looking south
ear in the river
Running just behind me
nose in the grasses
Vetch roots scooped out
by the bears in the gravels
Looking up the ice slopes
ice plains, rock-fall
Brush line, dirt sweeps
on the ancient river
Blue queen floating in
ice lake, ice throne end of a glacier
Looking north
up the dancing river

Where it turns into a glacier
  under stairsteps of ice falls
Green streaks of alder
  climb the mountain knuckles
Interlaced with snowfields
  foamy water falling
Salmon weaving river
  bear flower blue sky singer
As the raven leaves her boulder
  flying over flowers
Raven-sitting high spot
  ear in the river, eyes on the snowpeaks,
Nose of the morning
  raindrops in the sunshine
Skin of sunlight
  skin of chilly gravel
Mind in the mountains, mind of tumbling water,
  mind running rivers,
Mind of weaving
  flowers in the gravels
At the end of the ice age
  we are the bears, are the ravens, are the salmon
In the gravel
  at the end of an ice age

Growing on the gravels
  at the end of a glacier
Flying off alone
  flying off alone
  flying off alone
Off alone

Mountains and Rivers without End
Tatshenshini/Alsek
Lake

July 86

16 Feb. 83

Dear Gary,

Good to hear from you! There's very little data available on Owens Valley Paiute; but I talked to my colleague Paul Kroskrity, who works on the Western dialect (spoken around Northfork), and he tells me that the word for Jeffrey pine is also used for pine in general in that dialect, and that it is as follows:

phonemically, i.e. only writing distinctions of sound which are used contrastively by the speakers themselves, ***kušiwoqqóbi***;

phonetically, i.e. indicating finer distinctions of sound, which a non-Paiute speaker would need to know, ***kušiwoqqóbi***.

Some symbols still need explaining, of course. *s* is like *sh* in English *ship*. The *q* is like English *k*, but farther back in the mouth; it's the sound of Arabic that's also transcribed with *q*. The doubling of the *q* means that it's pronounced with twice the length of a single consonant. The *b* is something like an English *v*, but made between the two lips, rather than between the lips and the teeth; it's the sound of Spanish *b* in a word like *hablar*. The *i* is like the sound written bl in Russian—not far from the second vowel in English *roses*. All in all, not a very easy word for non-Paiutes to pronounce; but I'll say it for you the next time we talk.

Incidentally, the word looks like a compound, ***kusi*** + ***woqqobi***, where the second part is clearly related to the word for "pine" in all the Uto-Aztecan languages: Cahuilla ***weqet***, Aztec ***okotl***, etc. But kusi- by itself doesn't mean anything in Paiute; it's like the ***cran-*** in English ***cranberry***.

Later I may be able to get some material on the Owens Valley dialect, to see if it is the same—I doubt if it's much different.

(William Bright)

BRUCE ANDREWS

from STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

I remain astonished, what happened flutter tonguing—four torpedo rooms flooding, sir—toward a long coffin shaped box in which a young girl is sitting, huh, all night, ok? Might does not make right so I'm Auld Lang Syne, so what?, where were the original names? Aerial kindergarten then into double agent bed with the tight and growing tighter white points, scared at 1 a.m., lonely later as though the sea were *made* of sharks. Put my bandage in the barbecue and afterwards licked my scars, leaving something for the over-and-undermensch my self in the head, the most beautiful thin gowns and translucent slip and. . . .This is a straightforward business proposition—real what did point blank keep in touch, the faucets of revolution, then I forget. Not much good in it, a sort of gawkiness, bashful—a bride's whiskbroom in as white as you ever see and the preacher had not moved, the gonads of technocracy. Steal some milk—we pay back GOOD—at every juncture were waving red objects, were china bears and 'Don't get me wrong' then drew another closeup of fish being cut: go home and sport some barometers, bub. Nor had the marriage taken place, the serpents of leisure; hello, kiddies—lay the millions on me, I'll put on my dancing shoes truth when burned, rocks can change to metal. Not the stockage, but the sugar babies pump city, antlers of snow—eroded bumpered clean bang gone, oooooh. Into the body of a timid doctor is grafted the skull of a woman, we ate glass for a week; now for some plot. I'm told this was all true. My heart goes out; then a sky; no more—bring me my sermonette with the two ultraviolet imagery skulls and the package of dehydrated chicken, the spiracles accumulating over us, s-y r-b-r-t-u kim-v-yit-r in the preservation of the world, oxygen ring still in gold lame and what has pride got to do with memory. Whatever becomes you, to be landed on belongs to you in doing so, freed up; an old saw rests beside. Hi, I'm Aaron Spiegel, chairman of your local Kentucky Fried Chicken dealers, and now's the time, so

fucking perfect. What you can do with a sword that's not tangible, that leaves no mark, even on your scheme of things, bright lights, big city, frankly flesh folds in with ice cream and comes back as a penny collection with missing 1923D and 1955S, glassine holders, and kept in the closet with the stamps from Martinique where the Harvard cop is going on his honeymoon for $1400 and a thousand in traveller's checks. Then we bought Ecuador volcanic ashtrays, "particularly" a lapse in Aladdin's treatment. Saigon dirt, sandbags on fire, a marsh fills with sports balls. A word as a shill for the sentence: house deals, secular clasp; colors beginning to be concentric sweet surrender. Price?—maybe it's the mite and tick blood or the jars of whatever then growth with the embalming business, to scrape the many-faceted uterus. Radios and magma cut the air in the stall and there are some prizes over there, or the pan drippings of a Lugosi bat; let me down, I cheapen. Regret what I reject what I regret you're too young to know and too old to have known although the comes-before bring me down, venetian blind me down—he who mixes dye, takes on its color—BALL THE JACK. Go for patent leathers and the four winter winds, too many die. Too hurried then what is this? The cores of the fruit had encased within them small gates and pulleys which could put in motion a parade of initials. As the light is extinguished from my eye a wicker chair comes flashing through the smallest open window, showers dark glass on the table. Other emotions than these—of trembling, to see one encased, fear, Order of the Purple Heart some protection—hoheh hoheh hoheh hoheh hoheh INDEX, the sentimentality of honor rolls. Can the nerves processional?—pme ,pre!!—get him drunk in the negligee; plans and the structure of behavior, I-risk; her earrings shook like chili colored chimes.

CLARK COOLIDGE

REGARDING MORTON FELDMAN'S MUSIC AND WHEREVER IT ALL NOW GOES

"I don't start with any plans whatever. I just follow it through."

"I ask at the beginning of working on a piece: What is the material?"

"I no longer give things a name. (I don't call it variation, I just do it another way.)"

"When I work I'm a listener, I'm not a composer."

"I never understood what I was supposed to learn and what I was supposed to break. What rules?"

It doesn't feel any more like a matter of reaching around behind where nobody's been for a while and finding something new. Now we've got the full array of elements, exposure. Like the feeling in writing that everything's been confessed, or processed, if not confused? Certain modes start to come in dry, play out, turn invisible. So it's a matter of how things stand with each other? The distances/proximities the more crucial. For any continuation at all (blank screen). Maybe just open it up, and then walk in among? Perhaps a help to take the mind off whatever the mind knows. Look again, then stop. Not to think. Keep stopping to look again. "Actually now I just try to repeat the same chord. I'm reiterating the same chord in inversions. I enjoy that very much, to keep the inversions alive in a sense where everything changes and nothing changes. Actually before, I wanted my chords in a sense to be very different from the next, as if almost to erase in one's memory what happened before. That's the way I would keep the time suspended, by erasing the references and where they came from.

All quotations are taken from the essays, lectures and interviews of Morton Feldman.

You were very fresh into the moment, and you didn't relate it. And now I'm doing the same thing with this relation. And I find it also very mysterious."

The music (or any) profession: a consensus. Imagine that nothing had ever been agreed on (it actually hasn't anyway). How would the sounds appear?

We have warblers and we have symphonic bands. And all the lodged complaints, even in terms of notes, one could wish. And when we do happen to be knowing in time, right *on* it, we're as far as the globe gives from discourse. Walls cracking from pressure of all the claims that made them. "The question is, and it is because of John Cage that we must ask the question: Is music an art form to begin with? Or has it always been show biz based on a kind of small attention span? And by show biz I mean Monteverdi. Is music an art form, rather than a music form, that one could explore and be flexible with? I don't know if music is that flexible to make a metamorphosis into something that doesn't have a formula. But the minute you don't use formula you're considered a Third World artist, like Ives."

It may now be more necessary than ever to be reminded of what the materials are. And that art is not a set of problems solved, more or less, in the last hundred years.

Morton Feldman's music, for all of what might seem a more and more hermetic way of working, is the opposite of sequestered event. It is all out in the open of art, as fielded as it gets. How far away do you need to go to bring in a thing unforeseen? How far will the work let you go and keep the will to remain unresolved and not hide in method? Are sounds ever stronger than when unanticipated?

Perhaps it should all be strange and messy now on, no matter the discrete attracts. Stranger and messier until we have a new aggregate or at least a fresh sense of the matrix from which it all. . .I don't understand music once again, I guess I most mean in its structures and transitions and even in its standing nature, when I listen to Feldman's. Fear in its presence. Fear of pure presense? Is

there a horror of too much silence that forces us to grasp even the utterly insubstantial with which to build? A bringing of what has vanished into the substance of things? A land where even the exhaled breath is a spy.

It's a storm. It doesn't need underpinnings (explain). Or the veil around you, reach for your pen and you'll rip it. There are no explicative flavors, aromas of understanding. You're present and let it rip or nothing. It's morning, say, and now what do you mean to repeat?

"What was great about the Fifties is that for one brief moment—maybe, say, six weeks—nobody understood art. That's why it all happened. Because for a short while, these people were left alone. Just an unbelievable amount of energy, an unbelievable amount of talent, but the feeling I had was that there really weren't issues. It's as if you had fifteen Stravinskys. And that was absolutely extraordinary to me. It wasn't even a crisis of whether or not one should do figure painting or abstract, because everybody was painting so differently."

The field of Feldman, the scale of notes, is vast, but there is a way in which it is all intimate detail. As if every portion of the universe impinged. The sense that you are very close to a great many very large presences.

Sometimes I just want to say: Stop, Morty, music is *not* painting. But he can't forget. That painting is also a time-art. Or an interval as timeless as a Mondrian.

A constant press of large tendencies.

"We don't know what art is outside of style, very difficult to know what it is."

I think we have to do quite a bit of forgetting (destruction). Yes, white tile and everything. Reach back into the midst of where you point from. There is plenty of room. But it is never a figured space. What rules there?

Feldman's music a very open procedure, bold, of full definition. You might begin to hear the sound of instruments as brought back from beyond the style you took them for. And feel the memory imprint start to ease off, each time thinking you have been here before but you always never quite have.

"How pleasant tonality is, how seductive variation, how interesting repetition, so you have to fight against it as if the overtones didn't work." The way this century has been too smart, because all those things work. And nobody to stop you, whatever you think to invent, a kind of tragedy, as he says. There's no secret to music ("Either you put something against something else, or you feel it has some kind of organic continuity—there are no other approaches"). But there's also no further room outside this one from which to discuss what happens here from a position of strength. You're totally listening now, and there is no later about it (tendency).

"Action and thought as a simultaneity (Goethe), I love that."

Music may be bigger (an art form?) and crazier (makes less sense, more fear) than you think. I'm hearing how it all keeps going away from me, finally back to the original *long* way off, down tiers and horizons of opposite substance, to score paper and gilt edges. Funny how it doesn't float but goes solidly directional, even if fractional. Even if, especially if, you can't write it down. But play out there among it all and you'll see, hear the differences, loud as the monkey cliffs. He's stirring it all with *your* bone, the one of former fancies, pointed adorations of the splendid vast box it all comes in, the one you always assumed touched the very Ink of Creation itself. Buried now though. Mired out there in the universal. Feldman's hands are up before it and very often empty. "The whole idea is not to write a good piece. The whole idea is to get lost, and come out alive."

You mean it goes, it has to, to? It doesn't? ("Sharp is more directional. Flat is less.") And you're making this happen, not happen, right off in my face? I'm unhappy with it, will be happier, why don't you actually go away, etc. I want my golden things (times),

my ace captions, full landings, my lodge. But he's taking away what lasts!

To reach that point at which no other points.

"I feel that in my life I'm trying out another option. It's not philosophy. It's the option of writing very long pieces that are very difficult to play, very difficult to hear, and have to do with the life of the piece, whatever that means and not the life of the performer, or what happens to an audience when they go hear it. I'm trying to see what happens when the work does not depend on those other very important, very rigid factors."

What is this art that has nothing of something else in it? Surely there is too much easy connecting of art with other procedures. Standing in the friars' cells of Fra Angelico in Florence it seemed correct (even novel) to return to the image (the note, the word) as object of solitary contemplation, cut off from all those extraneous vitiating pursuits that are supposed to make us feel so good about our involvement with art. "I think we lost that religiosity about music, about *sound itself.* We don't want to live in a convent."

Think of thing, not of them. "If you need an audience, we don't need you."

I wonder even more about the continuing viability of *writing* as an art form, it being so bound to the engines of explanation. This writing here a huge frustration, since it can never embody what it is pointing at and swirling around (discussion). I should just shut up. It could just shut itself off? Feldman stopped writing his essays . . .and one could usefully wonder at just what point in his music?

"But you're not supposed to *understand* art. You're supposed to understand *culture.* Culture is mutual understanding. That is not communication. Communication is what I have in my music, with myself. Communication is when people don't understand each other. Because then there is a consciousness level that is being brought out of you, where an effort is made."

What is the story? No, what is the subtext? No, what is the substance? And what is all this going on between the masterpieces?

Doesn't it seem that the musical structures have become lodged, like grammar, in the same connectiveness, leading us always back along the same definitions to the same conclusions? Couldn't we afford to lose a lot of this purely connective tissue? But who wants to face up to *a* tone, rise or fall?

Are you in a misery, or agony of doubt, or just a mild malaise? Said complaint, whatever region or even form of relaxation, tagged to be relieved by a certain shelf-life music? It drips down the sides of the cabinets. But your job is not to fence or lap it up. Leave that to the border cats. The job is, perhaps, to ice it.

"I like the long pieces because you don't drink it, you sip it. You get saturated more and more. The only way you get deep color in rugs is to dip it over and over. You can't put Z against A in ten minutes. It takes saturating. And time is the liberator."

Feldman's music seems never to manipulate, as if never overdetermining its destination, so not rushing to insure the most ease (audience) in getting there. An absolutely non-rhetorical music ("I'm the Master of Nonfunctional Harmony"). A music without god or stain. A music as dependent on you as milk on the sky.

His makes all other music sound anxious for more space, for higher speed.

And he reminds me of what writing has never quite been able to get away with: Lost in that field purely of nouns that verb and stretch and edge, a radiance which comes when things are not used, not used with other things.

"The Abstract is not involved with ideas. It is an inner process like another consciousness. There is a real fear of the Abstract because one does not know its function. The Abstract Experience is only one thing—a unity that leaves one perpetually speculating. Whereas the literary kind of art, the kind we are close to, is in-

volved in the polemic we associate with religion, the Abstract Experience is really far closer to the religious. Collision with the instant is the first step to the Abstract experience. It cannot be represented. Once you make the leap into the Abstract there are no longer any definitions."

And silence for certain matters. The core function of art will not be defined. It operates according to what appear to be other than consistent laws.

This cannot be said.
This cannot be said.
There are no words.
There may be notes
but they are in another realm.

"You just have to forget about yourself."

25I88

STEPHEN RATCLIFFE

from NINE

Picture the square whose huge bronze canters when the light
on the dashboard warns SHIFT. But to think
that someone was getting the word, crossing
chores off a list, as fire will eventually warm
the most distant of rooms! If Monk's music
were his middle name, Sphere (9+3: twelve
tones), Ohio Blue Tips dropped from the thirteenth floor strike
on the sidewalk, sonata intruding for prepared piano.

Tonight she will start in again on Battista Sforza, regarding
d'Urbino's stare. But the more I thought about my name
mentioned the less it seemed to mean me.
Happy the bride the sun shines on today—
she begins to speak freely of homophones, mis en bouteille
sixteen years ago, a voice at the about-to-swing Dutch door.

Let it also be said that her plans included whatever follows.
Lilting comes back to want more of the Bach
Cantata, a vulture on the fencepost reviewing
frost on greens the first foresome stride toward—if this isn't
speech what is? Yes, he died soon after that, but no, letters
weren't smuggled from an Irish jail inside a visitor's vagina.
Sand fairways, on the other hand, best characterize Persian
Gulf golf, along with lizard-hole hazards and brown greens.

Profound amounts of garlic suggest Mediterranean connection
—if you lend me your razor I'll buy you the long sleepy drive
to Suite 1, 1782. A mountain of a man at 6' 7",
the toll taker's lower lip was like a second chin

sucking his soft candy half way home. Superior Hitchcock
given the violins, but does he know *anything* about shiatzu?

What cherished most running the risk of definition, so simple
to rest as a guide. Cold may snap your filed nails, yield again
the glasses lost beyond finding. We changed
in 1960 to a metamorphic style, such relaxed
lines, the periodic red slide intact as bars at every window.
Little rhymed with reason then, and under fluorescent lights
the smoke looked purpler. Meanwhile, I'll read a book in lieu
of driving (my guess is it was Getz who played the last four).

Does jammed together make sense, is that what you're saying?
Or TV news isn't "classic," the world's space endurance record
only 211 days? An arrangement in black and white
becomes Whistler's mother, which clearly affirms
what I've always held—the door to the room the light enters
as down the leaves and shiplap sides of walls November rains.

Ohio the first word of a sentence I dreamed I forgot, oil filter
augments the dominant thirteenth. So those are the columns
going down, Doctor Tuesday morning or afternoon, C and F
tied for the marathon fifth. For blue moon go back two
to the non-smoking table with red napkins
with green stars advancing toward Saturday,
which is however far away. There you'll make friends (verbal
inevitability, the blond answers to Zebra).

At which point counterpoint takes over, each sentence starting
from scratch. Ten adjacent spaces out from NO PARKING,

the fiddler we both hear talking of books is an Asian grocer
whose safe looks like head lettuce. Typology
means of spanning the ego/id abyss, the voice
changing when the poem begins: softer, breathless, hushed.

I'm trying to put this correctly, you might give fat trout more
than seven minutes. Thinned flesh-colored paint under bitten
nails, in licking for the flea she lost another patch of fur: I'm
trying to get this succinctly, and plant the avocado in a glass,
and think about tomorrow without undue alarm.
One of them if you're doing a portrait, otherwise
flashing off the film *Mary Had A Little Lamb,* cyclonic front.
Or say that words speak "to into over even until so for after

telephone specials. And be sure to ask about our telephone
specials." In what sense is French vanilla better than butter?
Strangeness, color, flavor, a backward glancing
of violins edged aside by the cellos—in a word
the music one finds in a song. All prepositions would make
adrenalin poisoning, which may be only the question.

Like waves of rhythm on four congas, any atmospheric effects
thereafter will be a subtle change of feeling.
You are percussive but can't keep track of it,
as if slinking with your bone against the wall you thought
no one could see you. The lights are a constant row, cadenza
read as The Heartbreaks, Larks, Four Barons, Ravens, Robins,
Swallows, Toppers, Syncopators, Striders and Billy Bunn and
His Buddies among others on Doo-Wop Delights tonight.

Concerning the notion of motion in music, is counterpoint
one vast tone poem, books in many languages all the same?
The ants come after syrup (cough) spilled on berries
under the empty branch, thirty-second bits and pieces
shuffled to find an arrangement the ocean at maximum roars,
the shadows behind me thrilling to join nouns to verbs.

Watery mornings the curbs were awash, the frogs then lifting
throats to the wind. You used to disagree without recourse to
fuck, Roman Shades fading at the clubhouse turn—
play the tune when the page turns. What you see
now is not the same view, so feel free to record over my voice
if you don't want it in it. Folded the sun would shine on you,
as at length every pageboy knows its own shoulder regardless
of the rose-stuffed couch whose Ur-print looks so nice.

Spelling test beguine, "annaxxacanthus," O flightless parrot,
where then moored the ancient skerry? Hamlet's father's ghost
wants his due, and the woman who cuts hay doesn't have it—
ethnic jokes seemingly at one's own expense.
So play gin if you can't keep poker straight,
the lions and tigers and bears dressed in a hoop will ignore it.

Because the block bowed where backwash filled it (six miles
of steel), grandmother dialed with a wand instead of her nails.
She hands him the wheel at schoolhouse curve, the librarian
always first to arrive. The doves will be marked
in memory of the three suicides they kept on ice
(Honolulu, Yokohama, Hong Kong, Manila and back, twice)

"BEEF." He too was reading Proust when the war broke out,
and the heat did not wilt them, their clothes did not wrinkle.

High cloud drizzle, hard cider, cream dried in the cast iron pan.
Refusing to say I'm broke again, Seasons Greetings
from a Bedu tent. Fuck the sense of never sleeping,
the tablecloth provides for all three cats. Inside the "A" side
drives the storm track north, in the empty quarter you forget
you don't know a chord from a key, so give me the shirt.

Too vigorous to give up active surgery, the weatherman knew
to put the touch bevel-side under. He used to be able to tell
a '57 Bellaire wasn't big enough to stop him drinking coffee,
now lets a couple of shingles bar the ledge.
Launching notes on the '22 grand cru, macho
as in demeanor, he talked specifically of the Dalkon Shield
whose hoop screwed the sea's concert: "sixty-six Hispanic
faculty, so you can't even shit without meeting a saint."

After hours of soft curves a redwood splinter. But consider
the theory of contrary opinion, where had to is not always
should have. At the top of the chart another fish
blows the wash north by northwest into plumes.
And why not learn to read the right way, letting them whisper
monosyllabically, fingers tandem inventing the keys?

DION FARQUHAR

TREADING CULTURE

Things used to be so much simpler: socialism or barbarism. Now it's either a babbling deconstructor or a First Amendment proto-fascist rabble-rouser. And Barthes run over by a speeding milk truck. Eleven planes took off while she waited for the bus, the express bus they called it. New York slash Calcutta. Not counting the landings, about one per take-off, but harder to see because they swooped down behind the same low terminal building the planes rose from. J.F.K. Express.

Potholes married to shot shocks of a mid-generation bus made your teeth clack, banged your shins against the plastic seats in front. The commodity nomadic, twenty-four hours a day. And they can't fix the roads. Or the subways. All this for under ten dollars. Support your local police.

The little prince the night bomber seeing the blood spread like anemones. Wrong war. Anyway. Accounts of the Hiroshima bombing told of survivors stumbling burned, battered, fleeing the city in long files on narrow rough paths while a smooth easy road lay empty and parallel. Muses mute, Minerva to radiated wind. Unable to see the pyre for the flames. And she on the set, unsettled, wondering whose funeral it was. Positively Periclean.

Now that summer school was over, she was supposed to be working. But it was always the same feeling since grammar school infatuations with nuns made beautiful by cascading veils and layers of long, ample skirts. (She fell in love with the sound of their rustle.) It was in sixth grade with Sister Placida that she was first self-consciously seduced by talk. The nuns taught her so well about form that much later she could prefer Bouvard and Pécuchet's discussion of eucharist to Hume's: "The miracle is done with words, however unworthy the priest."

Since grammar school she had dreamed of relentless abundance. The opposition of a couple makes a circle, says Plato in the *Phaedo:* "If generation were a straight path to the opposite extreme without any return to the starting point or any deflection, everything would have the same quality and change would cease altogether."

What put her over the line, she remembered, was the idea of bomb shelters. Your parents and siblings all together in one room, in an underground cement bunker, sleeping on fold-out bunks and eating canned food, unable to go outside for years. Not the good life.

Slowly, she backed off from the compulsion to call yet another indifferent lover she was pursuing. They all had their reasons for not being there, even the ones who lived with her and were advertisements for monogamy. Every one had a story, plus ça change, it was a cast of thousands (if you count families)—unparented short-circuited northern wasps, suffocating overparented Jews, mercurial psychotics of assorted lineage, brilliantly vicious narcissists. The script was the same, and she cast one shadow after the other, courting absence, nursing the sick, unable to bury the dead. But they were not dumb, and they liked their women smart. Maybe Mary Shelley had the right idea: let me build my own man.

Remembering she had left a welcome home message on Tony's tape yesterday, never trusting the technology completely, and now the beep went on at least twenty seconds too long, and who knew what that augured. How times change, she thought, with the evanescent memory of the literate.

"I'll take a quick trip to Europe," she thought, now that the summer was three-quarters over and she was depressed and not getting anything done. Tony was back and still putting her off. She tried to remember that with Tony a heavy flirt signified nothing beyond the moment. Go to Europe. To do that she would have to leave New York. Though greatly attached to her city, all travel marked her strongly, beginning with the ride to the airport.

Go to Europe. Not that she was rich, perhaps the top of the lower third or the bottom of the middle third in income bracket, but she was resourceful and had links with the underground economy. And terrorism and radiation had lowered the fares. Stop crying or give herself something to cry about. One of the Guerrilla Girls posters proliferating in her neighborhood had caught her eye one steamy summer night coming out of a cafe. It was a bold black on white with large clean capitals that said: "IT'S WORSE IN EUROPE." But daily life anywhere out of New York seemed materially easier.

Berlin would not be bad, she thought. A city halved by a wall was ironic and most importantly, there were friends, each one in

their gigantic apartments and alternative jobs. They seemed to sit in cafes and wine bars endlessly, never get drunk, and be almost as depressed as her friends in New York. Ute recovering from the married opera singer, Monika pregnant and crazy about Berndt who still wasn't sure, Mina celibate.

Trying to get comfortable on a plane, let alone get some sleep, was next to impossible. For once she had landed some interesting seatmates, a Lebanese couple recently relocated in Nice, though he still commuted to West Beirut for business. The woman, Nada, it means dew in Arabic, spoke of the ubiquitous fear of carbombs, the terror of raising children in West Beirut. He, Rashid, knew politics and history and his own class contradictions, beyond his work as tractor salesman, and all three talked through most of the long trans-Atlantic night, alternating anecdotes, analyses about their nations' fundamentalisms, their stories and comraderie shielding her from the turbulence.

Bumping around in a dehydrated cigar tube thinly disguised to look like a movie set while flying through the air at 400 mph for seven hours, one couldn't help thinking about death. She shifted her face toward the headrest, trying to get comfortable and could feel the invasive grit of polyester against her cheek. What capitalism giveth, capitalism taketh away. One prays, oh double standard, that the pilot isn't stoned on coke, the ground mechanics on grass, please, she wanted all their motor control and wits about them so cargo doors wouldn't fall off, so they could fly straight. For once, she hoped the workers did their jobs scrupulously, not caring about their alienation. Never mind what passengers did in bathrooms (as long as they aimed the recalcitrant smoke down the drains). Fly the friendly skies. Up, up, and away. Let us play.

The magnificence of flying—birds breathe pure air, the ancients thought—was almost obliterated by its total commodification. Dedalus, Icarus, Phoenix, her parakeets. But if you got high enough, spent enough, paid the piper (like turning your head into a cab to ride the subway without screaming or crying), you could make the commodity luscious. Finger-licking good. She had heard that the Concorde had buttery leather seats. Up furrowed narrow aisles, modest scale, aero-dynamically designed, by Italians. And from the cockpit you could see the curvature of the earth. Imagine. Trafficking streams a whole three hours. In and out, cockpit wide open.

Spectors, shades sating like omnivores, the speed of sound. (The more you pay, the more they trust you. Jordanians only slipped plastic bombs into unwitting Irish lovers' handbags boarding jumbo jets.)

Now the technology of flying offered a thousand combinatorial ways to die. Earth. Air. Fire. Water. By being crushed and impacted by one's own body pressed into itself, or flung outward into molecular pieces by explosion, or fire in the air before the crash, or on impact, flames roaring, ripping through the flammable cabin, or drowning as water seeps or floods through the fuselage. Night, Chaos, Eros are all wingèd. The Japanese businessmen on the pitching and rolling JAL flight, actually took out paper and pen and wrote notes to their families before the crash: love your country, obey your mother, do well in school, you will be missed, remember your father.

What to tell the dying about death, she thought in a lull in the conversation, that's the most difficult. What unites us is what most individuates us. If they're believers, tell 'em, this day you shall be with me in paradise. For the rest of us Cartesians, the idea that there is no more me is as paradoxical as the proposition "Everything in the universe doubled in size last night."

A few days later, she wrote postcards from an Amsterdam cafe. Travel solves nothing. Miserable amidst Van Gogh, despite canals and hash bars. In fact, it threw one back on oneself more than being home, eroding the finely wrought control that radiated from routine and her apartment, a tight aesthetic, compensatory control.

Her place was so comfortable now, after years of careful carpentry and calibrated consumption, capable of nestling a shoulder against the back cushion of the couch, cradling a hip in the corner of the sectional, providing hospitable surfaces for papers, generously placed lighting—all this on top of design, the Vasily chair, sanded floors, and the prize—her many framed posters, walnut on the Morandi, birch on the Rothko drawing, subway map in a thin Neilsen bright blue of the "A" line, uncompromised attention to detail. She periodically photographed the apartment with greater fervor than Amsterdam.

She'd fought Larry, her ex, for the five-room apartment, and she'd won. When they broke up—after one good year, two passable ones, and two years of hell—each told the other to leave, and each refused. They even got lawyers, but nothing could be done. They

were both on the lease. So they stuck it out as roommates for an entire year and a half, each living in two rooms, sharing kitchen and bathroom. She frequently suffered his door-slamming, temper displays, and general incivility. She'd offered to buy him out and even apartment-hunted for him. Everything was either too small or too expensive. And why should he be the one to move, after all, she'd ruined his life. It was all her fault. Her friend Julie, who had spent four years in Belgrade, assured her that her situation was common in Eastern Europe; estranged couples couldn't separate because of the housing shortage. Wasn't this like insisting on describing horses as wheel-less automobiles? Besides, they had better cafes and their academics didn't work like driven Protestants.

Early on, Larry's married girlfriend from New Jersey gave him a kitten. Now whether or not she knew that his ex was allergic is beside the point. He knew. So she lived with her ex and his cat, ingesting daily rations of allergy pills—better living through chemistry—occasionally regarding the frisky kitten with an eye to discreetly heaving it out a window or stuffing it in the refrigerator, but it was cute, so she didn't. When the kitten was a full fledged cat, on its way to feline middle age, Larry was finally ready to move, and he left the day after she returned from Japan to move to New Jersey, into the girlfriend's house, husband long gone. She was a nice person. Poor thing.

She met her old friend Gordon in Amsterdam on his detour from Paris, and they spent two days together. Enjoying liberal Holland (trick or treat) that threw out the lens-grinding Jew for teaching that each is a tiny worm in the blood of some great being, and mocked arguments from absurd design. Amsterdam was a city in which she felt the imperative of fucking, and it was good to be there with Gordon, a friendship of six years, the slide of signifiers, penetration without patriarchy. He had mentioned religion the other night in bed, in response to her complaint that her just-finished summer course was full of idiots (or very difficult students, at the very least), that they but one, were anti-porn. And Gordon had said laughing, "Even when I was a fundamentalist, I wasn't anti-porn." All those business majors, they're scared, like her parents. Victims passing the ammunition, Marx knew, make the best police.

The first over-layer of her fundamentalism had foundered on Catholicism's rigidity on the sexual. She couldn't see a lifetime of confession to thin-lipped voyeuristic priests. The Kinsey Reports

were coming out, for Christ's sake. All the non-Catholic couples she babysat for, and there were several (thank God it was Manhattan!), had a "Marriage Manual" in the closet. Every babysitter knew that if they had one, it would be on the top shelf in the back of the big closet in the couple's bedroom. By the early sixties marriage manuals devoted several entire pages to the clitoris. At fifteen that was the one part she understood. Late bloomer. Reading the past through the present at last. She was a woman of the next century. "Hysteria will absolve me."

Fundamentalism was one of the decade's themes so she had been forced to think about the nature of moralism. At the end of the Fourth of July weekend she was driving back from Amherst to New York with her friend Tom. Visiting different people, they exchanged capsuled stories on the road, talking a blue streak. The car radio segued into an early '60s rock song, u-bee, do-be, do-oo. Was disgust a fitting emotion? Denunciation not helpful? The teen angel lived or died of his love. He was cool and indifferent. It wasn't the single standard of Italian opera: the duet, *morir per te, viver per te*. How could such a message not be reactionary? Tom generously contended it was the affirmation of individual choice over parental decision. That context made it something else.

It's OK, she thought, by analogy to teenage religious zealotry, to have sought out the verbal humiliation of confession, and seek it she had. The fantasy is that it is not consensual. First of all, it turned her on, introducing her to mind-fuck, the only way non-bourgeois Catholics have a prayer of becoming intellectuals. Launched by the rush of interiority at fifteen, she knew she was onto something. There was more to this than Palestrina. The one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. Apostolic we keep. The one dies hard.

Alle menschen werden Brüder, quotes a finally-animated, Habermas at Northwestern, smiling to Nancy's gender question at the public lecture, engaging her totally and personally from the podium, an ex cathedra of sorts, the connection between them materially palpable, pristine, transparent across the auditorium, having forgiven her for her paper "What's Critical about Critical Theory?" Shilly shally. The one point Christianity improves on Plato: equal souls. Posthumously. Nancy's concern perfectly conveyed a thousand miles as easily as if they held each other's gaze.

In response to hearing a lot of high seriousness at a conference about Tiresias drinking the blood, the insistence on a single collec-

tive story, she wanted to protest, cite the pop culture figures. Art's all that's left, she thought. If it's capillary action they want, check out pop culture. Like Dracula, sucking and fucking his willing victims into faints, making the daughters of bourgeoisie unpresentable, keeping odd hours, rattling their coffins in castle basements, the living dead who disturb the peace of the fathers, pious physicians from the Netherlands. But it is Tiresias over Dracula in the canon, the safely dead, bloodless in museums like the new hospital-architecture MOMA, no rocking the boat at the drop of a hat.

Sailing the Sunfish with Nancy, lucid, brilliant Nancy in New Hampshire, the "F" in her last name she would spell, "'F' as in 'feminist'." She had particularly enjoyed making it sail as fast as it could, until the boat roared along shearing the water almost on its side at a forty-five degree angle. Aristotle says we get virtue by tacking, never in a straight line. But sailing, unlike the ethical life, is not moderate. You tack (or was it coming about?), because if you don't, Nancy had shouted, laughing through the foam and roar of the water, you crash into those rocks on the shore.

She went to German towns that had escaped the bombing. One was perfectly spruced up, every pointed brick shone, all pink and mint, pale orange, ochre, and blue facades from the eighteenth century. After one day of walking every exemplary clean street, visiting scrubbed cathedrals and precious shops, where even the pastry looked architectural, she half-expected to see Donald Duck in Alpine britches coming out of a doorway putting the garbage out.

Walter, her 60-year-old neighbor and bicycle partner called to continue their chat. She had bumped into him that afternoon on the street on her way back from buying ammonia for her cleaning man, if that's what he was; she'd used him once before. She couldn't stop for long because it was 95 degrees and there was a pint of Häagen Dazs in the bag with the ammonia. Walter asked what happened with Richard, her sperm donor/co-parent. Settling into a corner of her couch, she told him.

Richard was a psychologist who was chair of the soc department where he had been teaching for fifteen years. He had taken the job as a temporary wunderkind measure, planning to switch to a psych department later. The years passed, he got tenure, and the job squeeze hit psych hard, so he was stuck. He rarely got to teach Freud, had terrible students, and was generally burnt out on the academic bureaucracy. Fortunately, he had a part-time therapy

practice that he loved. He wanted to have and raise a child but wasn't in a relationship so he decided to do it alone.

Before she was introduced to him, Richard had been flying to the big surrogate mother facility in Detroit once a month for six months, cancelling classes and patients' appointments, to inseminate a woman screened by them. Or so he thought. Despite claims to reputability and medical thoroughness (none of this women's center do-it-yourself here), it came out later that the surrogate had one ovary and has had endometriosis, a high sterility risk factor. They did sperm counts on him and precise insertions on her. After six months of trying to conceive, Richard and the woman decide to stop because they can't take the strain (and they aren't even fucking).

Around this time they are introduced by Sarah, a mutual friend who had gone through analytic training at the same institute as Richard. Sarah is so discreet about motives that it takes them two encounters to decide if they are on a date or at a co-parenting meeting. They meet in Chinese restaurants and discuss over shared portions of dried sauteed stringbeans and salt shrimps with ginger why they each want to have a child and what their vision of co-parenting is. More and more she had come to take the side of the children. Dungeons and dragons.

He was always in need of more reassurance about why it might work as they discussed scenarios. She noted this reticence at the time and chose to ignore it. She liked him, no sexual vibes, but a friendship was developing, and she liked his way with the world. The possibilities were fertile. They spent hours on the details—feelings, logistics, finances. She told Walter, "All my eggs were in one basket. But his weren't."

By the time he noticed she was serious about co-parenting, the failed surrogate, who had been counting on the money to go to school, suggested to Richard that he try with her lover. So the surrogate's lover and Richard talked and agreed that they would try, independently of the medical facility. Again, ten thousand dollars went into an account, they signed agreements, and she was medically screened in New York. When she delivers, he gets the baby and she the money. Was this comparable worth?

At the eleventh hour, Richard must decide with whom to reproduce, and after frenzied negotiations all around, he decides to go with the surrogate because she is a sure thing. And then he gets

to raise the child alone, feeling in many ways it's easier that way. She is devastated and flies to New Hampshire to be with Nancy at the lake. The Yankee barn is overrun with ants. The exterminator is unimpressed with Nancy's calls. They cook gourmet food, comb the video stores for stimulation. She reads. Nancy writes.

Walter exudes empathy, saying "Oh, that's terrible" when she tells him Richard picked the surrogate over her. But ultimately understandable. He has money. She doesn't. And she was a risk, one he'd be stuck with. Biology alone is safer for the man. She had been noticing how conservative men are lately, and how women have taken the historical rap for it. But she couldn't see doing it alone, repeating from a feminist perspective what women have always done. Heroic pioneering was one thing. Martyrdom another.

Now real torture is something she wanted to avoid at all costs, and having a child all by herself qualified as real torture. The best description she ever read was by a woman, Oriana Fallaci, (Greek fascists torture resistance leader), but the other fifty percent pretty sucky, about love and a simpering woman. Perhaps part two compensates, apologizes for what part one has done.

She told Walter she understood (weak sense) Richard's choice. So let's stay friends. There was always the perfect ad to appear in *The New York Review*. Walter waxes enthusiastic about this one and that one having met through ads, and now they're getting married. A fairytale.

The problem of a public, being read, even among friends. Only fiction is free. With theory she feels like a fake. She hasn't read what everyone else has, refusing to graze in only one field. Lacking the discipline as well as the family, she never got trained in anything. For better and for worse. She has been passing, having been a pedagogy fundamentalist, reading lists of Great Books handed down by older friends who enjoyed mentoring. She read them systematically, reverentially, oblivious to their forms, satisfied by the virtue of her selection, if not election. But along the way, slowly, she had come to see that it wasn't such hot shit to be let in anyway. (Virginia Woolf commented that as unpleasant as it was to be locked out of the library, it was worse to be locked in.) By the time she realized this, she could feel guilty at having been taken.

She returned to the voice on the phone. Walter has unrealistically high expectations. She warns (weak sense) that it is possible but rare to get what one wants (strong sense) through an ad. Worth

doing, but maybe a one percent chance. The fun of it is hoping, getting thirty-five responses; the down side is that they are all inappropriate. She asks Walter how things are going with Leon, his lover of two decades, and twenty years his junior, who is living a breakdown. He says, "Bad, don't ask." He talks about it anyway, saying Leon is spending beyond his means, not looking for work, and generally proving unable to look after himself. "Oh, that's terrible," she says, echoing his response to her news of Richard's choosing the surrogate. The end, when one can't get out. Perhaps that's the worst. A part of where Walter is now.

Confinement was a big theme in Berlin, and no wonder with a wall or checkpoints in all directions, like fifteen lanes of toll booths except it's passport control, surrounded by barbed wire fences, guard towers, German shepherds, real machine guns. The East Berlin architecture so technocratic she couldn't photograph it. And she rode the city buses for hours, to the end of the line in all directions, testing her credulity. Mile after mile of communist projects, they made abrupt right angled turns and went on for another mile, spiritless, perpendicular, unalleviated by graffiti or garbage. A proletariat appropriated lives here. Square, staid, stolid, the same. Rough equality. For this a life, a bullet through the gut, dumped in a canal.

After twelve hours in East Berlin, she found a street sign that marked the intersection of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebnecht Avenues. The power of naming.

Back on the other side, signs, light snaking for miles. She hit the Ku-damm running, happy to see the neon cafes, twenty deep, a clatter of spoons, agitation raised on forks, carefully scooped as crumbs. Hard to be third camp here, she thought, drinking in the strobing commodification, returning to Bleibtreu Strasse and Monika. *Cave emptor.*

It was as impossible for her to imagine a world without politics or history as a world without writing, when all you had was interlocutors, yak yak yak, wine-dark seas and swift-footed Achilles. Hocus-pocus. Was science nothing more than a mess of porridge? The more transparent the less legible. And what of the abstract and brief chronicles of our time, or the depository of collective experience? The dream of perfect interlocutors had begun in school, grammar school. Shift the object and change the scale. From the bottom up. Double-entry metaphysics.

Plato understood the relation of pleasure and pain: "They will never come to a man both at once, but if you pursue one of them and catch it, you are nearly always compelled to have the other as well; they are like two bodies attached to the same head."

She wasn't so sure. Maybe their stories aren't true. For surely they lie about the body, and it is women who are (all) body, believing them most. For this she would never forgive them and would work against them at every turn. Pour the tea. Signal. Change lanes. In Germany, the law requires a signal to be sustained at least two blinks. She loved their speed, a nation that cruised at 140 (kilometers per hour) in new models, secure in their Mercedes' steel frames. Crossing from East to West, from Communist speed limit to the West's limitlessness, the cars sprung into motion, putting the checkpoint behind them.

He, she, it said. *Dixit Dominus*. Scan the horizon for a miracle. Perhaps a beautiful lady in blue robes in a field, on a dirt road, in a grotto, seen countless times by overwrought children, bored before the news of ennui had spread to southern Catholic countries, imagining their deliverance. And she in New York, loving the breath of Handel, color, form, her thirst, photographs, some- how one with them, wanting to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, and do criticism after dinner, or something like that.

She would work against them at every turn, defending the truth of the body wherever she could. That was where one chapter ended, with her giving an account. Plato says in the *Theaetetus* that account means putting your differentness into words.

The eighties were tough. They all had lied, preaching obedience to boot, parents and teachers, all complicitous, filling their charges' heads with lean lies without flesh, or sinew or bone. An axe to grind. Lizzie Borden betrothed to Bluebeard. There was no Prince Charming, and no Cinderella, the ball a bore, fairy godmothers and evil stepmothers were neither or both, beauty a straightjacket in their hands, and the coin of the realm filthy lucre.

By the mid-eighties, the sixties had been over only a decade, prematurely feted as dead. We got Springsteen, Dylan of our time, who tells us on record that his father wanted a lawyer, his mother an author, and they had to make do with rock 'n roll. To concerted cheers, castrati contracted to courts. Now Apollo's a spaceship, Argo a starch, Nike is plural as running shoes, Delta an airline, Emily Post our Proust.

And then there's the rush to religion at all levels, Hartman a rabbi saving the text, Kristeva and Sollers and the who-which-whats from Peking have gone over to Rome. Para-dis. And this is not the Rome of her friend Carla, who in May 1968 ran through the streets with thousands of others crying: *Perigi brucia, Roma brucira,* Roman Rome she would oppose at every turn. Homer over Rome, like Simone called it, starving herself to death. Desire in language. *Pas moi.*

Who, what had stolen or silenced the souls of her parents, a whole generation of them? What had gone down in those bourgeois nurseries, one-room peasant houses, urban slums before the crossings over with nannies, nonas, bubas. Then the passage over, did they loose it or had they never had it? The material struggle, rises and falls in fortune, left little surplus for coping with the death of imagination. When they weren't working, they sat in front of television sets, eagerly bringing them home, crown jewels on cushions, welcoming the first console, a place of honor in the living room, then the first portable, finally the color set, a king's ransom. The mystery of civil obedience celebrated nightly.

It was so sad. But that did not stop the children from calling their parents worms, as Paul had his father the other day. This the admission that it could have been otherwise. Ought implies can. Of this taxonomic principle, too, she was unsure: victims are not worms. Plato understood that contradiction about generation. Bronze parents could produce gold children or the other way around. But argues that radical change entails breaking the nuclear family because fathers hand down fallacies to sons, *per omnia secula seculorum.* No nukes. Twist her arm.

The two Francis Bacons. Eggs over easy. A side of pork. The English can't cook. *Nature Morte.* Cheek by imploded jowl. Bringing home the bacon, from the laboratory to the kitchen and back again. The first Bacon made it clear. We will interrogate nature, draw her on the rack, stretch her secrets from her. Triptych in deed. Pillar to post. Newman fucked the canon too. The Stations of the Cross. The fifteenth has an orange stripe down the left side. The first Bacon died of pneumonia from experimenting with chickens in a cold dark cave, pouring ice down their throats to test freezability. Oven stuffers. It takes a tough man to make a tender chicken.

The second Bacon as a child was beaten by his father, an obsessive horse trainer. Boy-love. The first Bacon wrote James I,

militant witch persecutor, on the glories of scientific experiment: "You have but to follow and as it were hound nature in her wanderings, and you will be able when you like to lead and drive her afterward to the same place again. . . .Neither ought a man to make scruple of entering and penetrating into those holes and corners, when the inquisition of truth is his whole object. . . ." Nobody here but us physics. Boys will be boys.

She had been introduced to the second Bacon by her Brazilian friend Fernando, in the early seventies, at a small gathering at his and Argentine Pedro's apartment on the twenty-sixth floor over Picasso court with a northern skyline view, perfect cuisine and touches like half-frozen cokes in little green glass bottles. On this gentle night together, tangos playing, they were all tripping on mescaline. She and Fernando were sitting on the floor up against the northern wall of glass when he pulled a *Maestri del Colore,* the Bacon number, out of a wicker basket on the floor, saying in mellifluous Carioca, Look, Diana, do you know Francis Bacon, the painter? No, show me. He slowly turned the pages for her. Couples, cardinals, portraits. Oh my God! Alle-gory. This was a different vision, critical to the point of self-laceration.

But never cruel. Like Stanley K. to Blanche. The only unforgivable thing is deliberate cruelty. It all hangs on the status of "deliberate." Maybe that's what to tell her kids when they taunted her repeatedly, "Why study philosophy?" She answered them, "So you can be better poets." Starving us slowly is nothing in comparison to what they have done to our souls. Bread and roses. Along with Wittgenstein, who thinks there are things that can be shown that cannot be said. A discipline hostile to poetry in its founding myths.

There shall be no end to quarrel and dissention until philosophers be monarchs. Banana republics. Plato got it wrong, hated the hoi polloi to the degree he acknowledged the power of convention. Bad customs "would habituate lions to flee deer!" Christianity would have the lion lie down with the lamb. Marx would turn lambs into vigilant sheep. She the cow that jumped over the moon. Little Bo-Peep. Until philosophers be poets.

Let them be fruitful and multiply, the free play of forms. Stop the obsessive worry about standards until everyone has had a chance to speak. Fuck the canon that has gagged generations, the tip of the iceberg, torn out our tongues, stopped up our ears, filled us with noise. The Enlightenment. Ha. ***Fiat Lux.*** Brand names. Story of the

Eye. *Arbeit macht frei.* Crossing the border to avoid the bother of a police investigation. In translation. Embattled. Writing as disaster, the ultimate perversion. Against the idolization of labor. *De omnibus dubitandum.*

HILDA MORLEY

OUT OF NOTHING

That time, over 20 years ago, in Venice—
I said: I'm on the track of a mystery:
the consonance
between men's bodies & the bodily rhythm
of a city riding on the sea
This time, 12 weeks ago—
it was no mystery, only a thread dropped once,
recovered now:
face to face with
our beginnings, surrounded
by the shapes we had guessed were
somewhere,
hinted at, glimpsed
when we first came forth from the sea,
the amniotic
sea, launched into
separateness,
in light
& screaming
our discomfort,
to be attached & not
attached,
separate
yet never alone, How we longed for
that web, those threads, how often
mistaking a touch for a belonging
that was not there & being alone
for independence.
But here
in the "loveliest of cities" all
is reflected, given back,
related
in form,
so substance

This poem will appear in a new collection of Hilda Morley's poems, *Cloudless At First* (Moyer Bell Ltd.) to be published in 1988.

itself melts into other substance: the shape we make,
whether
mounting or descending
a curved bridge or
sitting under arches
near San Marco sheltering
from the rain,
seeing umbrellas flower
as Italian violets, pale lemons,
apple-greens,
blood-oranges, to feed
our eyes.
What is reflected is
a part of the same curve,
related as
one stone inside the arching of
a colonnade answers the curving
of another, the paired notes
chiming
& even in the chill of
late March, early April warmth
is echoed from these walls, these courtyards,
gardens
half-hidden by wrought-iron
gateways, from heavy oaken doors, their boltings
carved, eloquent,
the narrow passageways, faces
of the passerby,
clouds scurrying
alongside,
lovers
their rosy cheeks touching
in the rain, eyes alight.
They are a recognition.
It is the inner life
salutes the outer.
(Fingers stretching
make bridge-railings
what they are,
our breathing
is air moving,
trees branching
into wind)

I had thought—as I remembered it,
there would be space between us,
space flowing
as if at the end of a long scarf
rippling
in wind:
the buildings,
light, the water, a shimmering
& air between us moving,
but space nevertheless.
So it was, once, that time—over
20 years ago,
when I walked with him here.
I remember from then the cobblestones
& my feet hurting.
But this time
all is different: I am caught up—it is all one, all
made of a single piece
in a belonging
I never felt before.
I am inside it—an organ living
in this body of delight,
or a stream running
over bridges, along canals,
joyousness
in the twisting grillwork,
a thoughtfulness
in carved windows,
in the little squares.
They make a network & they fill me
blown into curves that merge with theirs,
in essences
of dance-reflections.
For it is out of nothing
that we began—like this city,
foundlings
in a reed-cradle, survivors
in the bulrushes.
All our treasures
purloined on pilgrimages—
desperate errands
in irrelevance.

WILLIAM CORBETT

INTRODUCING BEN WATKINS

Ben Watkins and I have been friends for more than twenty years. He can be as formidable in argument as anyone I have ever known. I can see and hear him some twelve to fifteen years ago constructing one of his brilliant machines mowing down all in its path. He was arguing against photography as an art, and I was no match for him. Now my revenge is to introduce this selection of his photographs made over the past three years. I have no "I told you so" because Ben hasn't come around to my way of seeing things. He is busy pursuing his own point of view.

When you know someone well and see them frequently events blur. I don't remember exactly when Ben picked up a camera in earnest. But soon after he did his house began to fill up with cameras and film; his book shelves with books of photographs and, after a time, his walls with prints of his work. Ben does nothing halfway. Before photography his interests were wine, the piano and bicycles. He went into these with his characteristic omnivorous attention, and while he drinks, plays and rides today these were diversions on his way. At least this is how it looks in hindsight. Ben had no idea he was on any "way" to something that could involve him totally, mind and body, and be his work.

This work has not only encompassed mastering the machines and techniques of photography but finding his eye, finding what in the world he wants to see with his camera. And his eye has lighted on city structures and people as landscape.

The attempt at categorization is mine. I am struck by the way the infrared Albany State House or Alexander Hamilton on a snowy day in Boston and the soon to be obliterated Dover Street Station (also in Boston—Ben's home for twenty-five years) are both solid and delicate. They are here in material presence with a suggestion of their spiritual nature. The headless bag lady in "Franklin Street, Boston," the leaping roller skater and snake with sunbathing youth are, I guess, also structures in that there is no attempt at indicating

character. These people *are* the landscape that surrounds us in the city.

To my eye Ben's work descends from Atget and Paul Strand. I find its spirit classical and its nature somewhat severe. Perhaps chaste is a better way of putting it. Nothing offhand or taken for granted. It is as if the world Ben sees has composed itself, and he must have the patience and persistence to catch it just as it is. But that's what I see today. There is much more to come. The pleasure of this introduction is that it introduces the work of a late bloomer, a man who has come in his late forties to see what his work is, who wasn't even making images five years ago. Ben is in the position of knowing what he knows now and starting all over again. And start he has!

Boston 8 November '87

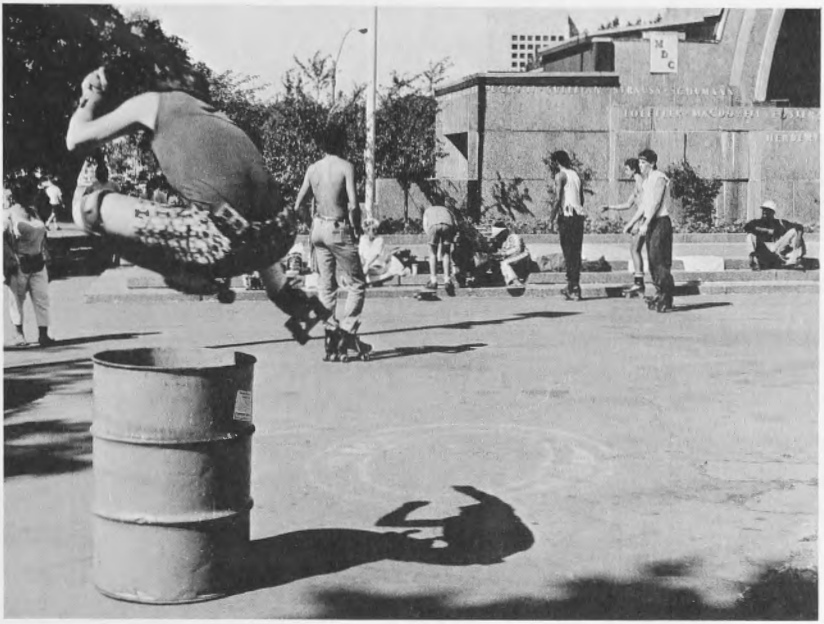
BEN WATKINS

SIX PHOTOGRAPHS

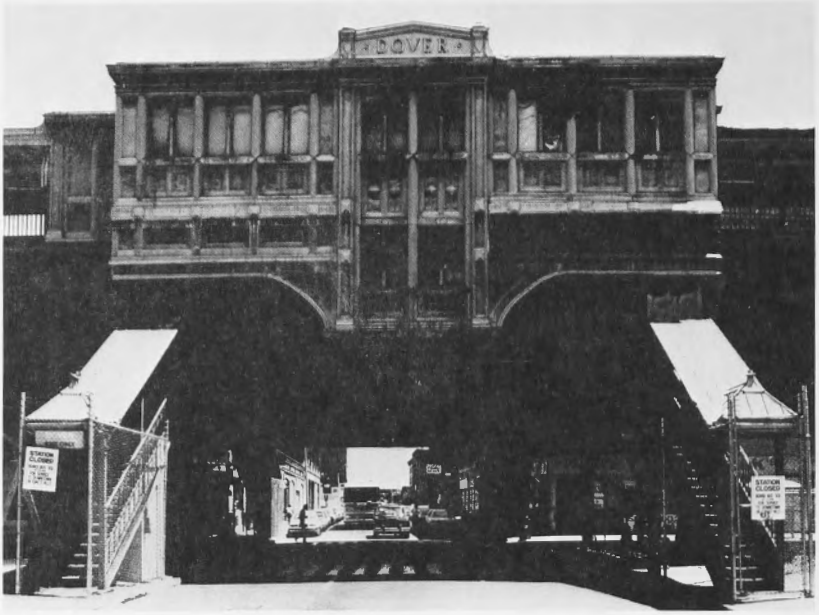
FRANKLIN STREET, BOSTON, 1986

COMMONWEALTH AVENUE, BOSTON, 1986

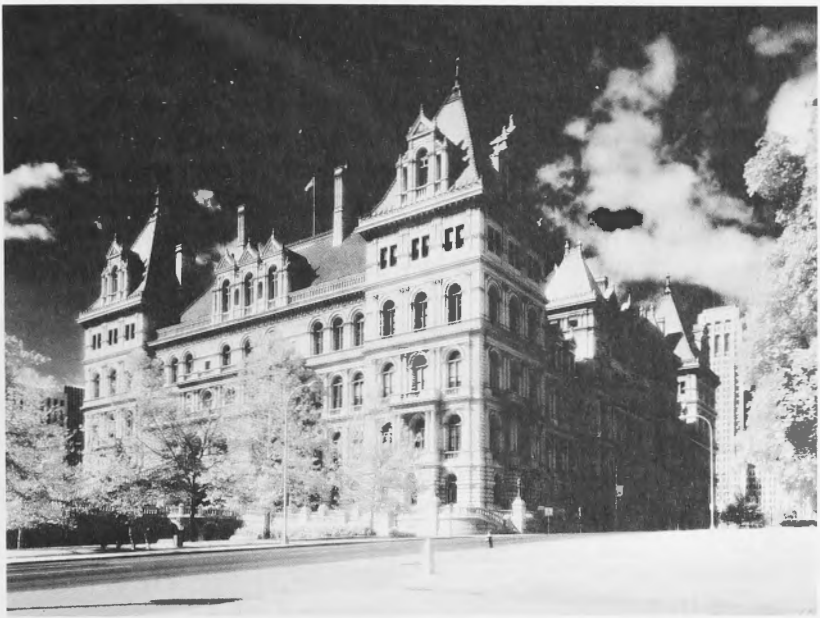
WEST CANTON STREET, BOSTON, 1987



ESPLANADE, BOSTON, 1987



DOVER STATION, BOSTON, 1987



STATE HOUSE, ALBANY, NY, 1986

CLIO DESCENDING: NORMAN O. BROWN AS AMERICAN MODERNIST

PART I Three Sisters

I begin with a story, imaginary but true.
"Police today picked up and booked a suspect who has been charged with several counts of fraud and perjury. The suspect, an old woman, of no fixed address, believed to be of Greek descent, has been working for many years as a bunco artist. Cross-examined by Chief of Detectives Brown, she could only repeat, over and over, a long rambling story."

Quite right that Clio should stick to her story. Right that, in the face of all the evidence, she should insist that it makes sense. What else has she got to say? Beginning and middle and end. Tell a story as if there's a story to tell. Once upon a time. But what if there's no story to tell? If there hasn't been for years? Keeps the kids quiet. Not to mention the old goats.

Stout plump Clio. . . . . .sorry, wrong Greek. Conservative old Clio, determined to go down with the plot. The case of her sisters has for some time now been a very different one. Many years ago, after the Russian theater closed down, Terpsichore went to New York, smashed the old patterns and, after a post Petipal pause, found release in freedom, meaning in abandon. Euterpe, putting down her lyre, took to tapes and technology, emitting bleeps and clangers, and finally settled down to a very good job as an electronics engineer. Where, you ask, is harmony, mighty harmony? Where indeed—picking tonal clusters. Heigh ho the Berio! Of course Euterpe's old music can still soothe us as we linger in the museum, tracing figures in the gathering dust, listening to Mozart and the other Etruscans.

So much for the swinging sisters. Other than learning to count, Clio clung to the old ways. Now time's running out on Clio. Hurry up please it's time. Goodnight ladies. Closing time. Goodnight, Clio, Goodnight.

PART II Vox Populi, Vox Goldbug

Allow me to perpetrate a solecism. (What's good enough for God will surely do for a professor?)[1] Norman O. Brown, American writer. It's not how long he's been in America but how long America's been in him.

Ezra Pound is one of those in him. Ezra Pound, modernist. Ezra Pound going east. What did he go for? Not for history, which he hated (who can blame him for that?: bloody old Europe!), but for the past. Those who have the future are condemned to need the past: need it most of all. Ezra Pound finding modernism in the past, ransacking China, Provence, Rome. Back to the classics! NOB and Pound—two classic cases. Pound's classicism is pretty dubious, you say? Ah well, Hailey ain't Oxford.

There's no escaping Pound's ideas in the making of this other American; no escaping the vision of the past in the *Cantos:* the hatred of usury: the determination not to be taken in by all that glitter, all that phony history: by the bankers and the politicians and the public lies. NOB and Pound—two radical cases. Scorn for the conventional and the respectable. NOB and Pound sharing a Populist mood. Certainly there was a bit of "blessed madness" there in Kansas. Mary Lease as a Kansas Maenad; "Sockless Jerry" Simpson as a prairie George Fox: lots of internal heat, even with shoes.[2]

Yet it is so often an untenable mood, an unstable position. It was for Pound. The Cross of Gold and Populist democracy led in some tangled way to Fascism and St. Elizabeth's. Even more untenable for NOB. His radicalism has had always to be resolutely undemocratic: "esoteric, and aristocratic, self-consciously separate from the profane vulgar."[3] For him the academy becomes the political battleground. Problems enough there! You may convert even Kansas, but an American University? We must recover the mysterious and the secret; recover the sense of mystic ecstasy and bacchic frenzy found in Ficino's academy or Plato's. Sure. You bet. But if you bet you lose. That idea has been greeted with conspicuous coolness at Panhandle A & M, and further on up the line too, though bacchic frenzy has found its adherents. Norman Brown as Professor Mary Lease thundering: "Let's raise more hell and publish less corn." It is a complex fate being a university prophet. Vico knew. Prophets should be disregarded, not promoted. Anyway, at the end of both roads, Populist and radical academic, there is only heartbreak. This new country is so very old; more conservative than any place. What an odd place to come to, to make it (politically) new. Goethe knew: "Amerika—du hast ein besser standard of living." A *New Yorker* cartoon: [two Puritans looking over the prow of their ship; one says]: "Initially I've come over for religious freedom, but in the long run I'm interested in real estate."

Ezra Pound going East. Ezra Pound going east for Kulchur. A modernist or a barbarian? Perhaps both. Listen to the song the shopsalesmen sang:

The Goths came over the Ocean
The Goths came over the Ocean
The Goths came over the Ocean
(tourist class)
To see what they could buy.

Listen to John Strachey on the Eliot/Pound *Waste Land*, John Strachey, pre-war and pre-radish, one of the authentic voices of the old-fashioned European Marxism of NOB's Oxford generation.

> Mr. Eliot's feverish erudition is characteristically American. In *The Waste Land*, for example, he does not so much use the accumulated culture of the old world, as ransack it. Yet perhaps it is just because he is an American that he has the courage and the energy to write the epitaph of the culture of the old world.[4]

Energetic Ezra despised it, but needed it: the finished material from which the new is made: Europe is finished. Ezra despised it, but wanted it. Ezra, Hearst on his own petard. Anyway, if Pound's chief influence is as artist, as modernist: *il miglior fabbro*, the deepest affinities are not ideas at all, but temperament, character. Like Ezra in his perverseness, his occasional ranting, his fascination with power. Like Ezra above all in his turbulence of spirit, his courage, his fierce dignity.

PART III Brownian movement

Norman Brown going west. He did Pound backwards: stood Pound on his head? Of emigration and emigrees. We are a nation of immigrants.

> Send these, the homeless, the tempest-tossed to me.
> Give me your huddled Marxists. . .

NOB belongs to the great transatlantic migration of artists and scientists, of scholars and intellectuals of the 1930s, the complex consequences of which for American culture, it will take time, if historians have time, to unravel. Bloody old Europe. Good night, Neville, good night. There's nothing left to see. It's all coming to an end. What is the epitaph for this culture coming to an end? But of course it had started earlier than that; the sense of the old world gone bad. The bitch gone bad in the teeth. Lights out, Sir Edward, lights out everybody. Goodnight, Europe, goodnight. But of course it was earlier, earlier even than that. Civilization is unbearable. Gentlemen behold the New World. Start over. Start anew. Go west Señor, and bring back some barbarism. The state of nature—ain't it wonderful. "Indeed, only barbarians are capable of rejuvenating a world laboring under the death throes of unnerved civilizations."[1] A group of rejuvenators: Norman Brown in Santa Cruz. Henry Adams in Tahiti. George Sand in Indiana. Let's lite out for the territories. (Huck) Finn again.

But there was no frontier; only another chapter in that recurrent dream of escape, another chapter in that nightmare of freedom. Said Lawrence: "Men are less free than they imagine; ah, far less free. The freest are perhaps least free."[1] Of course NOB should have known it was all play-acting. Primitivism: one of the oldest traditions. He should have known. Dear Marie Antoinette, holding that Sevres milk pail. Was the cow's udder china too? Emerson and Alcott and Brook farm. Lawrence again: not Brook farmers but book farmers.[2] Once upon a time. Let's pretend. Negligent NOB: hadn't he read Frederick Jackson Turner? That dream of freedom and of escape was most definitely not justified by the census of 1890. Of course, it was more than frontiers, territories. Not a place at all: a state of mind; especially in old places like Concord.

Emerson was one of those in him: deepest in him. Emerson and Brown; so many rich similarities, most of them stated very plainly in NOB's Phi Beta Kappa address, "Apocalypse." The "American Scholar" re-written. The second "American Scholar"; this time, quite appropriately, at Columbia, once the British King's, now America's. Hail Columbia! Show and tell at Columbia. Scandal and dismay at Columbia. "Apocalypse," the third declaration of independence; but this time not from the British King, not from British culture; this time: down with Descartes.

Brownson of Emerfather.

The smiling sage of Concord, bland and benign, looking out on his golf course? Not really. There is also the private Emerson of the journals, occasionally lifting the mask. "Out of rude unhandselled nature come the berserkers, the druids and the destroyers."[3]

Yonder caveman, who is he? The scholar as berserker. That's what NOB heard in Emerson, when most weren't listening—destruction. Tear it down. "Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs?"[4] Destroy it, and then you can make it over, make it new.

Yonder druid, who is he? The scholar as prophet.

> I am for preserving all those religious writings which were in their origin poetic, ecstatic expressions which the first user of did not know what he said, but they were spoken through him and from above. . . . . .those barbarous and sacred words, to which we must still return, whenever we should speak an ecstatic and universal sense.[5]

The prophet as poet:

> The poet knows that he speaks adequately then only when he speaks

somewhat wildly; not with the intellect used as an organ, but with the intellect. . .suffered to take its direction from its celestial life.[6]

The Poet inspired and stoned:

This is the reason why bards love wine, mead, narcotics, coffee, tea, opium, the fumes of sandalwood and tobacco, or whatever other procurers of animal exhilaration.[7]

The Poet inflamed and insane:

The poets are thus liberating gods. The ancient British bards had for the title of their order, "Those who are free throughout the world." They are free, and they make free. . . .If a man is inflamed and carried away by his thought to that degree that he forgets the authors and the public and heeds only this one dream which holds him like an insanity, let me read his paper, and you may have all the arguments and histories and criticism.[8]

The Poet as Modernist:

Nature abhors the old, and old age seems the only disease; all others run into this one. We call it by many names, —fever, intemperance, insanity, stupidity and crime; they are all forms of old age; they are rest, conservatism, appropriation, inertia; not newness, not the way onward. . .[9]

The way onward. The Modernist embracing the new. "In nature every moment is new; the past is always swallowed and forgotten; the coming only is sacred."[10] Santayana on Emerson's audience might well be Santayana on Brown's:

They flocked to him and listened to his word, not so much for the sake of its absolute meaning as for the atmosphere. . .that hung about it, as about a sort of sacred music.[11]

PART V Clio's Arm

We read him now, not as thinker or seer, but as artist, modernist artist, making it new. His true achievement is esthetic, not political—a challenge to the traditional form of history-writing: telling the story from beginning

to end, tracing cause and effect in rational sequence. Among any number of similar voices listen to the American historian Allan Nevins in his volumes on the coming of the American Civil War.

> It will be primarily a narrative history; only a careful narrative can lay bare the inner meaning of the crisis, as only an ordered story can do justice to the suspense, drama, and human passion of the era.[1]

But what if there is no inner meaning? if there is only disorder? What situation have we if we can trust neither the teller nor the tale? What is the appropriate form for history in our time: that is to say, for the history of nightmare? No wonder NOB admires Joyce, the great forger, the arch fabricator of the new form of the modern novel. A different comparison is with that other remarkable emigree and theorist of the outrageous, Marcel Duchamp.

1913, an auspicious date: El Oco and the armory show. Duchamp, bringing modernism to America. Duchamp, "Nude Descending a Staircase":—scandal and dismay: "an explosion in a shingle factory." Duchamp exploding the common-sense surface planes of the painting into myriad splinters and fragments. A painting is not a representation of a visible, ordered world outside it; its terms of reference are internal to itself. A painting is paint put on something. A painting does not tell a story. If you need a story, you may make up your own. I won't make one up, but will tell one told of Matisse. A lady, visiting his studio, looked at one of his paintings and said: "But, surely the arm of this woman is much too long." Matisse replied politely, "Madame, you are mistaken. This is not a woman, this is a picture."[2] Duchamp, getting this far sixty years ago, went further. In his glass paintings he tried to obliterate the conventional visual distinction between viewer and object, seer and what is seen. And then went on to question the idea that the work of art must exist in a fixed or permanent form. It won't stand still in time but is continually re-made, re-seen, re-ordered. Make it new. Make it over.

Nothing analogous to this in the writing of history. The rational order of the past, unimaginably complex and elusive as it is, is certainly there behind it all, and our analysis, our stories, represent it. But what if there is no there there or anywhere? "The continuity is fractured."[3] That story is not 'history'; it is ink and paper and words upon a page. Enter Norman Brown. 1959: *Life Against Death:* scandal and dismay: an explosion in a shit factory. Now as we read it, impelled by the classic lucidity of its expository prose, we are struck by how traditional it seems. Oxford had done its work well. In terms of form it was a dead end. History cannot be more uncertain than when he who creates the thing says he cannot narrate it. NOB fabricating a new form, beginning a voyage to find the proper structure for the

unexpected, the proper morph for the surprising. This is the true audacity of *Love's Body:* the polyformism of narrative cubism.

Clio stripped bare by a Professor, even. Myth and archetype and irrationalism splinter the surface of conventional word painting. Bursts of wit shatter the notion of the work of art as fixed and unchanging. Puns, word-associations, etymologies as a form of action painting. All true literature is witty. Duchamp too loved puns.

> I like words in a poetic sense. Puns for me are like rhymes. . .a play on words that can start a whole series of considerations, connotations and investigations. . .an infinite field of joy—and it's always right at hand. . . .If you introduce a familiar word into an alien atmosphere, you have something comparable to distortion in painting, something surprising and new.[4]

Emerson too loved words. "Language is fossil poetry." "Every word was once a poem."[5] Emerson had showed the way toward unsettling everything:

> Do not set the least value on what I do, or the least discredit on what I do not, as if I pretended to settle any thing as true or false. I unsettle all things. No facts are to me sacred; none are profane; I simply experiment, an endless seeker with no Past at my back.[6]

Now NOB, a restless unsettler, getting Clio off his back, takes these fossil poems and puts together an 'assemblage' for our time: a Latin tag, a newspaper quote, a graffito, long passages from familiar texts and from obscure ones, from himself, from Joyce, quotes which are themselves parodies of something else: mirror poetry. The reader moves back and forth among these "found objects"—(remember Emerson again: "the invariable mark of wisdom is to see the miraculous in the common")[7]—in and out among texts, reminding us that we cannot be sure where we are. The Nietzschean aphorism, the original stylistic device, is now varied in tone and expanded in scale, so that one has blocks and panels as the structure of the composition; composition not linear but relational. We move from one panel to the other; from association to association. And in between—those interludes, those spaces, those silences, in and through and on which the reader paints his own gloss. A gloss on a gloss. Like Duchamp's glass paintings. A gloss on a glass. History is glossolalia.

This venture, carried through to the end, is *Closing Time*. As with many artists, the later work reveals greater economy of means, is more controlled: like Giacometti, condensing, compressing, refining, reducing. Like John

Cage, almost nothing left but silence. *Closing Time:* a collage of quotations. A conversation. Voices overheard. *Closing Time:* a trio. Vico speaking, Joyce replying, Brown varying the theme. *Closing Time:* the charm and wit of its chamber music; how it is said is what is said. *Closing Time:* history aspiring to the condition of poetry; poetry aspiring to the condition of music.

PART VI Brownout

The lights keep going off and on and off. Let's wind it up. For the last time, Goodnight Clio: goodnight, bad dreams and good riddance. Shut up shop. Close it down. But wait. Another voice: Coleridge's:

> The common end of all narrative, nay of all Poems is to convert a series into a Whole: to make these events, which in real or imagined History move in a strait Line, assume to our Understanding a circular motion—the snake with its Tail in its Mouth.[1]

Wherever we are, are we far from where we were in the beginning? Finnagain Beginagain. In the end is our beginning. A circular process of recurrences. Is the new so modern or the modern so new? Santayana on Emerson is Dizikes on Brown:

> . . .among Americans, he may be said to have won a place,. . .if not by the originality of his thought, at least by the originality and beauty of the expression he gave to thoughts that are old and imperishable.[2]

Is Clio really displaced? Clio, with a tale in her mouth, speaks:

> When the thunder is over, when you have finished holding hands in the dark, when you have clawed your way out of the rubble, then, by a commodious vicus of recirculation, someone will appear to sing you round and round and round again.

To which I reply: a likely story.

—JOHN DIZIKES

NOTES

PART II

[1] Norman O. Brown, *Closing Time* (New York, 1973), p. 63.

[2] Brown, "Apocalypse."

[3] Brown, "Apocalypse."

[4] John Strachey, *The Coming Struggle for Power* (New York, 1933), fn., p. 218.

PART III

[1] Brown, *Closing Time*, p. 62.

PART IV

[1] D.H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (London, 1972), p. 6.

[2] Lawrence, *Studies*, p. 99.

[3] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar."

[4] Emerson, "Nature."

[5] Emerson, *Journal*, November 15, 1841.

[6] Emerson, "The Poet."

[7] Emerson, "The Poet."

[8] Emerson, "The Poet."

[9] Emerson, "Circles."

[10] Emerson, "Circles."

[11] George Santayana, "Emerson," in *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*, Trident Edition, Volume II, (New York, 1936), p. 153.

PART V

[1] Allan Nevins, *The Ordeal of the Union* (New York, 1947), Volume 1, "Preface," p. viii.

[2] E.H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (London, 1962), p. 98.

[3] Brown, *Love's Body* (New York, 1966), p. 1.

[4] As quoted in Katherine Kuh, *The Artist's Voice* (New York, 1962), pp. 88-89.

[5] Emerson, "The Poet."

[6] Emerson, "Circles."

[7] Emerson, "Nature."

PART VI

[1] As quoted in Thomas Vogler, *Preludes to Vision* (Berkeley, 1971), p. 197.

[2] Santayana, *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*, p. 164.

NEGATIVE SOLIDARITY: REVISIONISM AND "NEW AMERICAN" POETICS

In the psyche as in metrics, stress is an index of change. The concept of change demands it, insisting upon an incompleteness or insufficiency to the whole: stasis is not possible. Whether we conceive of this ineluctable movement as a teleological path ("history leads to us"), or as an indeterminate, reactive shifting, like the restless geologic wandering of continental plates, the transience of the social norms of poetry presents contemporary writers and readers with enormous challenges.

The problem is at once one of both the limits of alternative canons and of the inherent potential of the medium itself. Both are questions of representation and imply two major axes of tension. First, that of shape—canons are defined by borders, that is, by exclusion and negative terrain—and then of cause. Something at the heart of writing itself dictates incompleteness.

When, for example, we find Flaubert complaining to Louise Colet of an inability to achieve his vision of a perfect prose, one that could abolish style itself,[1] the model implied suggests completeness. Writing is a given that remains to be perfected. Soon after, however, Baudelaire in the dedication to *Paris Spleen* consciously inaugurates a new genre, the prose poem, fully aware of the consequences. Calling poetic prose a "miracle," and, with arch irony, claiming that

> from the very beginning I perceived that I was not only far from my mysterious and brilliant model, but was, indeed doing something (if it can be called *something)* singularly different, an accident which any one else would glory in, no doubt, but which can only deeply humiliate a mind convinced that the greatest honor for a poet is to succeed in doing exactly what he set out to do,[2]

Baudelaire compares his volume to a serpent. For him, the world of writing, although it might once have promised completeness, no longer can: an insertion of the new ruptures the whole, demonstrating the gulf between intent and action, between language and its referents, to be absolute. More recently, Charles Olson argues that "What does not change / is the will to change."[3] In the same poem, he continues:

> Around an appearance, one common model, we grow up
> many. Else how is it
> if we remain the same,
> we take pleasure now
> in what we did not take pleasure before? love

contrary objects? admire and/or find fault? use
other words, feel other passions, have
nor figure, appearance, disposition, tissue
the same?
To be in different states without a change
is not a possibility

If Baudelaire's pleasure lies in the scandal of indeterminacy, Olson's focus is on its generative potential. The power of Baudelaire's gesture rests upon a demonstration of the unthinkable. Olson's ready acceptance of incompleteness radically opens the poem to a universe that is itself indeterminate, unfinished, subject to change.

Here Olson differs from such early American modernists as Hart Crane, Laura Riding or Ezra Pound. For each, the often distressing social and material transformations that accompanied modernity did not alter transhistorical principles of truth or aesthetic value. Thus, in Pound's *Canto CXVI,* if the poet "cannot make it cohere," we are at least assured that at some level "it coheres all right."[4] Completeness is thus exterior to the text. From this perspective, Crane's "The Bridge" differs from its canonic predecessors solely in the modernity of the object portrayed.

Of the writers cited, only Olson's poetics, which locate the site of knowing and identity within the unconscious and that in turn within the kinaesthesia of the body,[5] suggest that aesthetic values, far from being transpersonal and transhistorical, might differ dramatically from reader to reader, community to community, epoch to epoch. In contrast, even as it announces its rupture, the scenario of the Fall of Writing invoked by Baudelaire's serpent suggests a later reunification, some transcendent future moment when poetry might again become whole. It is in this sense that, even as many poets seek to alter and reshape their personal conceptions of a determinate Canon, capital C, so as to include their own contributions, they do so in a conservative manner: their work subjectively *completes and thus conserves a canon,* which is now no longer insufficient.

The self-proclaimed moments of newness with which the history of twentieth century art is littered are thus often (although not always) also claims of completion. One index of stress, the hyperbolic violence of so many manifestos attests to the force deemed necessary to crack open the rigid shells of older canons. It is in this sense that what may be most distinct about the collective project that has come to be known, rather unwillingly, as "language poetry" is not its writing, but its reception, not its attack on a prior canon, but that canon's reaction. Like other avant-garde movements, "language poetry" began by identifying its own distinctness, criticizing the naive assumptions of a speech-centered poetics.[6] But, unlike

many of its modernist ancestors,[7] "language poetry" also drew ***positive*** connections between itself and the work of preceding generations, most explicitly to the New American poets of the 1950s and '60s: the projectivist or Black Mountain writers, the New York School, the San Francisco Renaissance and even the Beats. The parallels between these adjoining generations are many: an urbanism shared with the New York School; a concern for the cognitive potential of poetry not unlike that of Olson, Creeley or Robert Duncan; a fondness for parataxis found in Jack Kerouac's prose as well as Olson's verse.

Most importantly, both generations have defined themselves as opposed to the bland confessional narratives of workshop verse. Consider this description:

> The new younger poets have written a large body of work, but most of what has been published so far has appeared only in a few little magazines, as broadsheets, pamphlets, and limited editions, or circulated in manuscript; a larger amount of it has reached its growing audience through poetry readings. As it has emerged in Berkeley and San Francisco. . .and New York City, it has shown one common characteristic: ***a total rejection of all those qualities typical of academic verse.*** Following the practice and precepts of Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams, it has built on their achievements and gone on to evolve new conceptions of the poem. These poets have already created their own tradition, their own press, and their public. They are our avant-garde, the true continuers of the modern movement in American poetry. [my emphasis]

Not an unimaginable portrait of "language poetry," this is in fact quoted from the preface to Donald Allen's *New American Poetry*.[8] Yet, for the most part, workshop poets have responded to this most recent challenge of their institutional hegemony with silence (preferring instead to rehash the debates of the 1950s by renewing their attacks on Allen Ginsberg[9]). Far more vociferous and hostile has been the reaction of some poets associated within or relatively close to the older New American project.[10]

This critique has been so heated and sustained that it has surfaced everywhere from the *San Francisco Chronicle* to *Partisan Review*. The specific charges are the following: "language poetry" is alleged to be driven by theory; it is anti-speech and thereby anti-individual (sometimes this is extended to anti-democratic and elitist); it participates in self-conscious collective behavior; it valorizes the ugly and the unintelligible; its leftist politics are strident and didactic. Taken together, the implicit claim is that "language poetry" is a closet academic verse, seeking explicators rather

than readers, utilizing Marxism to pander to intellectual fashion and intimidate skeptics. The notice which "language poetry" has received from some critics, notably Marjorie Perloff, Andrew Ross, Frederic Jameson, Lee Bartlett and Jerome McGann, is then summoned as evidence in support of this allegation.[11]

I and others have responded to these charges and there's no need to repeat that here. There have of course been a far greater number of writers coming out of the same New American tradition who have demonstrated interest and support to the writing, generously and also sometimes critically.[12] Rather, what needs to be asked is why this peculiar debate has arisen now? Ultimately, that question is not about "language poetry" at all. The complaints which have been raised against "language poetry" can most positively and usefully be read as a coded and indirect self-critique of the New American project itself.

The primary function of the proposition of a speech-based poetics, for example, was as an approximate unifying principle for writers as radically dissimilar as Denise Levertov and Gregory Corso. Olson's equation of the verse line with a hypothetical breath-unit in speaking, the syllabic distance between non-syntactic pauses, offered New American poets if not a theoretical rationale for their work, something that would function in its place: it distinguished them from the academic poets of the 1950s, establishing their claim to the heritage of Pound and especially Williams, rendering their uneven and unusual line lengths immediately visible on the printed page, and providing the basis for a prosody rhythmically more complex than anything possible in a reiterative stanzaic or metrical pattern. By equating the line with the presence of speaking, New American poets were able to argue that their verse was alive, as against the dead absences of the written word. The strategic importance of this argument was widely recognized: the lead essay in the Allen anthology's appendix of poetic statements is Olson's "Projective Verse."[13]

The argument against theory reflects a similar function. Many New Critics, after all, were poets, and precisely those for whom the epithet "academic verse" had been coined. In addition to producing bland poems whose commitment to order was much more than an occasion for irony, the New Critics had achieved institutional power through institutional means, subsuming creative energy to administrative demands while actively decanonizing such earlier generations as the Romantics. New Critical poetry embodied the instrumentalization of literature. For some in the 1950s, therefore, to be ***for*** critical writing was equated with an aesthetics of bureaucratization.

Whatever the tactical advantages that a speech-based line and the distrust of theory held for the New American poets, their operational result

was to abandon large realms of the possible. That these positions represented at best a strategic stance and not a fundamental poetics is visible through the many dissents voiced by these very same poets. The Black Mountain writers produced a substantial body of both reviews and theoretical writing, although taking care to stylistically distinguish themselves from anything that could be mistaken for normative academic exposition. Jack Spicer, trained as a linguist, ridiculed Creeley and others whom he felt idealized language and speech.[14] Olson's later Maximus poems, his essay "Logography,"[15] Creeley's *Pieces,* his discussions of the implications of the typewriter, paper size and the visual contexts of language in interviews with Lewis MacAdams and Michael André,[16] and Paul Blackburn's *The Journals* reflect a concern for the written as profound as their earlier valorizations of the oral. Indeed, Frank O'Hara's essay on Pasternak explicitly rejects Mayakovsky's public persona of the poet-as-speaking-individual as a pose deadly to good writing, and his manifesto, "Personism," places its emphasis on the individuality of the reader, not the writer.[17] "Language poetry's" initial rupture with speech, therefore, was not so much a break as an interpretation, a foregrounding of concerns already active within New American poetry.

What we find in the attacks on "language writing," then, is a defense of a poetics that never quite existed, although one implicit in the reductionism of Ed Dorn's blurb to Creeley's *Collected Poems:* "He is the master of immediate speech and this is the compass of his written art." It is the very ambiguity of this status that may account for much of the emotional energy now being discharged.

Artificial though it may be, the distinctness between these two generational manifestations of the avant-garde tradition was heightened in the early seventies by a curious limbo into which the New American poetry had fallen. After the Berkeley Poetry Conference of summer, 1965, identifiable New American counter-institutions dwindled. The gradual absorption of their writing (and many of their writers![18]) into a rapidly expanding university system, reduced the activity identified with the New American project and rendered it far less visibly oppositional. The revival of the Objectivists and their influence, as well as those of the New Americans, upon a younger generation of school-bred creative writers further eroded what had once been sharply defined borders. From the vantage point of social history, the achievement of the New American poets lies not in having opened up a closed canon in order to seat themselves alongside (or even replace) the kitsch of the New Critics—although this may have been an original goal of some—but in having helped to irreparably weaken the walls of canonicity itself. Their explicit challenge to the parameters and norms of institutional verse came at a time when the university system was

incorporating a more heterogeneous population than it had previously known. A significant consequence was that the neglect (really the suppression) of other writers and types of writing became more perceptible to newly emerging audiences, from categories as broad as women to specific literary movements, such as the Objectivists. One instance of this inter-relationship between New American poetry and an emerging pluralism can be found in the protofeminist *Four Young Lady Poets,* copublished in 1962 by Totem, a small press founded by LeRoi Jones. Another would be the aggressively expansive anthologies of Jerome Rothenberg.

But one impact for the New American poetry was the loss of its "outsider" status, and it is to this point that the complaints against "language poetry" has persistently returned.[19] Outsider status appears to have given some New American poets a sense of cohesion, possibly even identity. The existence of a different phenomenon occupying such similar territory suggests not merely the failure of their revolution, but also that the New American absorption into a heterogeneous "mainstream" could only have been accompanied by a parallel loss of internal completeness. The observation is not entirely incorrect. The allegation of collective behavior, for example, ignores the fact that it was the New Americans themselves who served as a model in this regard. Their inability to sustain institutions of oppositional community only underscored the value of solidarity for many younger poets. David Henderson, introducing a recent panel on language and ethnicity, commented that he found the solidarity that had caused the misnomer "language poetry" to stick interesting since it marked the poets and their work in a fashion that somewhat parallels the experience of difference familiar to poets of social marginality. That may be an overstatement, but it remains a significant distinction between these two generations. Yet, ironically, the stance against "language poetry" represents a ground for a solidarity of its own, as well as for an alternative interpretation of the New American tradition, one that is individualist, anti-critical and speech-based.

The importance and political content of negative solidarity should not be underestimated. For example, the complaint against closet academicism—which subsumes the charges against theory and politics—reflects a larger anxiety over the increasingly dominant relationship of the university to the institutions of poetry in America. Because the "language poets" have arrived at different positions out of a shared tradition, they become a surrogate for this problem. That the specifics of the charge are inaccurate, a metaphor in the place of a metonym, is precisely what marks its political centrality. Similarly, the critique of the aesthetics of "language poetry," particularly its stance against the naive assumption of speech, individualism or "beauty," reflects a parallel concern that any answer to academic

colonization cannot be found at the individual or personal level. Maddeningly for these poets, the sheer presence of theory as an integral, if secondary, component of the "language poetry" project argues that ***writing itself is not sufficient for completeness in poetry.***

Well, it's not. Academic colonization is contemporary poetry's fundamental social problem precisely because it incorporates the politics of culture into a process that can only be determined institutionally. And, as women, people of color, sexual minorities and others marked by differences of language, region, religion or class have recognized for some time, this process is never neutral and has nothing whatsoever to do with abstract aesthetic value. If the challenge facing any oppositional poetics is how to remain marked, literally stigmatized, a poetry from a largely white male tradition such as that of the New Americans confronts special difficulty. Further, in arguing *for* individualism and *against* critical thinking, the poets who attack "language writing" are virtually forced to avoid stating the case for their own collective project positively. This would explain why the energy placed into exposing "language poetry" has not gone instead into a defense of the work of Allen Ginsberg. Unable to speak the poetics of their own name, these latter day New Americans have at least evolved a genre through which this can be known. That its form, debunking the "language poets," requires that they always focus upon *other* writers, and exactly those in whom they claim to have the least interest, is an irony they may never learn to appreciate.

—RON SILLIMAN

NOTES

[1] *Madame Bovary*, translated by Lowell Bair, edited by Leo Bersani (New York: Bantam Classic, 1981), p. 326.

[2] *Paris Spleen*, translated by Louise Varese (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. x.

[3] "The Kingfishers," *Archaeologist of Morning* (London: Cape Goliard/Grossman, 1970), no pagination. The slash mark is part of the original line.

[4] *Drafts & Fragments of Cantos CX-CXVII* (New York: New Directions, 1968), pp. 25-27.

[5] See especially "Proprioception," in *Additional Prose* (Bolinas: Four Seasons Foundation, 1974), especially pp. 17-18.

[6] See, for example, Robert Grenier's "On Speech," reprinted in *In the American Tree*, edited by Ron Silliman (Orono, ME: National Poetry Foundation, University of Maine Press, 1986), pp. 496-97.

[7] See, for example, "Modernity—An Incomplete Project," by Jurgen Habermas in Hal

Foster's *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983), p. 4.

[8] (New York: Grove Press, 1960), p. xi. On the comparative development of tradition, press and public, it is worth noting that the 40 poets included in *In the American Tree* have to date published some 277 books between them while the 44 contained in *The New American Poetry* had, at the same time of its appearance in 1960, pulbished just 112.

[9] See Marjorie Perloff's "*Howl* and Its Enemies: The Genteel Reaction" in *Sulfur* 20, Fall, 1987, pp. 132-141, for a recounting of the recent debate over Ginsberg.

[10] Tom Clark, Edward Dorn, Robert Duncan, David Levi-Strauss, the late Darrell Gray and Andrei Codrescu are some who commented upon "language poetry" in terms that echo Norman Podhoretz' dismissal of the "Know-Nothing Bohemians."

[11] To date, however, no one has attempted to explain why, if the "language poets" are literary "Stalinists," we should be appreciated by Perloff, whose anti-communism is vocal and so reductive that she is apparently unable to distinguish between Trotskyists and Stalinists. See "To Q," in *The Quarterly: The Magazine of New American Writing*, No. 3, Fall, 1987, pp. 239-56, and especially the comments on Louis Zukofsky on p. 244. Her essay is scheduled to reappear in *Paideuma*.

[12] Jerry Rothenberg, Robert Creeley, Larry Eigner, Anne Waldman, Clayton Eshleman, Bill Berkson, Michael McClure, Joanne Kyger, Peter Schjeldahl, and Ken Irby come immediately to mind.

[13] *The New American Poetry*, pp. 386-397.

[14] See the second letter to Lorca in "After Lorca," *The Collected Books of Jack Spicer* (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1975), p. 25, and "from The Vancouver Lectures, #1," in *Caterpillar* 12, July 1970, especially p. 179.

[15] A companion to "Proprioception," in *Additional Prose: A Bibliography on America, Proprioception & Other Notes & Essays*, edited by George F. Butterick (Bolinas: Four Seasons Foundation, 1974), p. 20.

[16] Both are included in *Contexts of Poetry: Interviews 1961-1971*, issued as Writing 10 (Bolinas: Four Seasons Foundation, 1973), pp. 137-170, 191-214. See, in particular, pp. 161-62 and 196.

[17] *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), pp. 501-09 and 498-99 respectively.

[18] At least nineteen of the Allen anthology poets would eventually teach, although only five or six appear to have done so by the time the book was published in 1960.

[19] Tom Clark's essay in *Partisan Review* ("'Stalin as Linguist,'" Vol. LIV, No. 2, 1987, pp. 299-304) is virtually a meditation upon this point, although Robert Duncan's remark about "language poetry" "usurping" the heritage of Zukofsky, along with his comment that "language poets" are "like a crowd of mosquitos off there in somebody else's swamp" (in an interview with Michael André Bernstein and Burton Hatlen, *Sagetrieb*, Vol. 4, No. 2 & 3, Fall & Winter 1985, p. 127), is more succinct.

DAVIDSON AND WEINBERGER ON LANGUAGE POETRY

November 22, 1987

Dear Eliot,

As someone who has enjoyed your incisive (and invective) remarks on recent American writing over the years I was very disappointed in your recent *Sulfur* note "On *Montemora,* America & the World." I thought you took an unnecessarily nasty swipe at Ron Silliman's anthology and in the process called your own important editorial efforts into question. A well-considered critical review of *In the American Tree* would be worthwhile, but to link the poets in that volume to Reaganism, nationalism and dehistoricization is to substitute broadside blast for careful analysis. Furthermore, the use of "Reagan" as a master-trope for the age has become an all-too-common way of avoiding specific historical facts and processes that go beyond the president of the moment. If Reagan has "infected every particle of life in this country" it has entered the body of *Montemora* as thoroughly as it has the Supreme Court or the proponents of "language writing." The question should be, which vehicle offers the most powerful antidote?

What I have said about "Reagan" applies for "language writing," a term that in the hands of some journalists and academic conservatives seems to sum up all that is bad, base and anti-humanist. It seems willfully naive to say that because "language writers" have grown up in an era of television they uncritically accept its reification of life. If television is the cause of our problems then all writing is similarly tainted, your own as well. I don't think you are trying to echo Allan Bloom or E.D. Hirsch, but there is something of the overprotective parent in the way that you warn us of the depthlessness that comes from watching too much t.v. Your note seems far too content with gross overgeneralizations and stereotypes of the sort that, to apply your own logic, seem the pure product of a television generation trained to look only at surfaces for the purposes of immediate gratification.

One point that you could have profitably developed in a different direction is your discussion of the pervasive monolingualism of this culture. *Montemora* did indeed provide a salutary alternative to the narrow English/American focus of most journals during its period, but to suggest that since the figures in Ron Silliman's anthology are not primarily translators they are therefore a reflection of this dominant culture is to ignore some crucial distinctions. The fact is that many poets in the anthology *have* translated and many more in the list of "comparable worth" have as well. I don't need to mention all of their names but would point to Michael Palmer, Geoff

Young, Lyn Hejinian, Charles Bernstein, Bill Berkson, Bruce Boone, Barbara Einzig, Marina LaPalma, John Yau, Joseph Simas, David Melnick, Bob Perelman and myself as writers for whom translation has occupied an important part of their literary careers.

But even if the group *hadn't* translated, would this make them into narrow xenophobes or nationalists? Certainly their literary interests are broader than the English/American tradition. It hardly seems necessary to mention the influence of continental philosophy and theory on "language writing," a fact that dominates most negative criticisms of the movement. Walter Benjamin, Roman Jakobson, Roland Barthes, Viktor Shklovsky, M. Bakhtin, and Julia Kristeva occupy prominent positions in critical essays by language-writers. Of course these are "theorists" and perhaps don't qualify in your book as authentic foreign *writers*. When you talk about "writers" you mean "literary" writers, but here again, you avoid the powerful fact of French Surrealism in the writing of Michael Palmer, Charles Bernstein or Barrett Watten, or the influence of European novels on Lyn Hejinian, Steve Benson, and Carla Harryman. Much could be said about the relationship between Dada or Surrealist performance and Poet's Theater as represented by figures like Kit Robinson, Bob Perelman, Tom Mandel, Jean Day and others. And the importance of Russian Futurism to these poets is, as you acknowledge, pervasive. One could go on naming names and citing instances, but the larger point is why anyone should have to name names and point fingers in the first place. It should be patently obvious that "foreign" writing has made its impact on many figures in the language movement and that the *absence* of foreign authors in a reading list does not constitute adherence, however unconscious, to Reaganomics or Reaganology.

The other problem with your essay is its equation of the non sequitur, as practiced by language writers, with Reaganism. Surely discontinuous, paratactic, or whatever writing has been around since before the Silliman anthology. I believe that techniques of radical juxtaposition occur in many of the figures listed in *Montemora's* tables of contents. And why are "Cubist simultaneity, Surrealist collage, or the Poundian ideogrammic method" so radically different from the discontinuous writing in, say, Clark Coolidge's *The Maintains* or Lyn Hejinian's *My Life* or Susan Howe's *Defenestration of Prague?* I think that in all of the movements and authors mentioned here, the non sequitur functions not to destroy history, as you suggest, but to bring alternate forms of temporality into play. *My Life* and *Defenestration* are powerful critiques of a certain type of narrative logic, one that controls autobiography and the other that controls historiography. The use of elements from discontinuous semantic or semiologic domains breaks the hold of one kind of teleology (cause/effect, "natural" progres-

sion, syllogism) and establishes an alternate one. And more importantly, it exposes that teleological model in a dialectical fashion, showing the degree to which "history" is legitimized by specific forms of writing and figuration. When you equate language writing and "nationalism" you employ a rhetoric of equivalence and homology that we easily recognize in the speeches of public officials. And when you speak of the "infection" of Reaganism into "every particle of life" you use a metaphor of disease that, in another context, you attacked when used by the editors of *Rolling Stock*. I'm not implying that "the new sentence" or any new writing practice will cure rhetoric of its relation to larger power structures, only that even the most astute social critic has difficulty writing "outside" of these structures. One of the important critical uses of the non sequitur is to call attention to this fact.

Of course you know all this already. I'm not saying anything that isn't repeated time and again in the essays at the back of *In the American Tree* and framed in every piece of cultural criticism from Benjamin and Brecht to Jean Baudrillard. The fact that you are completely aware of these matters makes me wonder what the real agenda of your article is. There is something about the way that you end your essay, invoking the giants of modernism (Pound, Williams, H.D., Rexroth, Eliot, Zukofsky, Olson), that reminds me of a strategy used by earlier critics like Lionel Trilling or Irving Howe who dismiss the current generation for un-Arnoldian backsliding. It is the old argument between the ancients and the moderns in which the fact that the ruins are still standing bespeaks their greatness. Anything that veers from the true and narrow suggests a decline in values. *Montemora* was, to my mind, always a testimony to the fruitful admixture of Modernism and more recent writers, "foreign" and domestic, experimental and traditional—in short, the kind of literary admixture that made the journal a companion to *Roof, Tottel's,* and *This*. Once the practices and values of one generation are held as self-evident proofs that the next will never match up we are back in the nursery, or at least back in the classroom. I don't think that's where the discussion of complex modern literature (or politics) belongs, but it is increasingly where the debate is being conducted.

Sincerely,
MICHAEL DAVIDSON

1 December 1987

Dear Michael,

As your letter was intended for publication in *Sulfur,* I'll similarly switch into public debate mode. . .[For space reasons, I omit some mainly predictable remarks on Reagan, television, and AIDS as metaphor, and go straight to the L-word.]

1. First, a matter of definition. "Language" poetry is a term generally understood by everyone who is not a "language" poet. (Indeed, the one unmistakable sign of a "language" poet is the denial that "language" poetry exists.) Although it is now breaking up from the inevitable power struggles that occur when individual artists or writers realize the limitations of group identity, it was, in its day, the most organized literary movement, ever, on American soil. Some 40 or 50 poets, running 20 or 30 small presses and magazines, produced a mountain of printed matter, almost entirely limited to work by or about members of the group. This in turn led to a number of anthologies—by and of members—in mainstream magazines and larger and university presses, countless appearances at academic symposia, and a stream of favorable critical commentary from professor-critics. Which led to a remarkable amount of publicity, from the friendly skies of an airline "in-flight" magazine to the dank sewers of right-wing publications like *Partisan Review* and *The New Criterion.* Yet this enormous hoopla never translated into much of a readership, even within the small world of poetry. The last time an anti-establishment poetry movement was in the news, its major gathering (Donald Allen's *New American Poetry)* sold 100,000 copies. In contrast, the three most accessible introductions to the movement, Bernstein and Andrews' *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book,* Messerli's *"Language" Poetries,* and Silliman's *In the American Tree* have, I understand, sold from one to three thousand copies. (It is not, of course, a measure of aesthetic importance, but rather of a genuine public interest.)

Discussions of "language" poetry are, for me, always skewed by the inclusion of Clark Coolidge, Susan Howe and Michael Palmer in the various "language" anthologies and magazines. (And many defenders of "language" tend to summon up Coolidge, Howe and Palmer when the going gets rough.) Their presence is surely the product of personal and not group affinities. Each of the three, in utterly different ways, is far beyond (or actively contrary to) the proscriptions of Perelman, Andrews, Watten, Silliman, et al. Coolidge is obviously a direct descendent of Louis Zukofsky—without sharing Zukofsky's love of hidden organizing principles and multilayered reference and self-reference. His intense musicality, a combination of Elizabethan lyricism and the improvisations of bebop, is unlike anything else in "language"-land. Howe, through her poetry and

critical writings, has become the great (and probably the last) poet of a certain thread of American history and myth—the true heir to Olson. Palmer comes directly out of cubism and surrealism, with lessons learned from Spicer, Creeley, the "objectivists," Celan, Jabès, and many others. Taken together, the three represent a continuation of modernist preoccupations with musical structure, dreams, history, myth, psychology, image, dialogues with the dead, and the invention of a "personal" style dependent on a hyper-referential ("charged") language—all stuff the "language" poets are generally attempting to shred.

I exclude all three in thinking and talking about "language" poetry, as well as Jackson MacLow (whose inclusion in the Messerli anthology is rather like the Red Brigades bestowing honorary membership on Jean-Paul Sartre), Bernadette Mayer (whose presence in the Silliman book I can't understand), and the two writers of crystalline narrative prose, Robert Glück and Lydia Davis, whose appearance in the "language" poetry canon is the greatest mystery of all. Once these, quite different, writers are separated out, what's left is an extraordinarily cohesive set of practices and concerns, one that coheres beyond the enthusiasms of individual members for writers outside the group.

2. Once, just once, someone should write a defense of "language" poetry without employing the words trope, paratactic, temporality, historiography, semantic, semiologic, reification, dehistoricization, teleological, dialectical, syllogism, figuration, rhetoric of equivalence, homology, strategy. (All of these in your 2-1/2 page letter!)

Given that "language" poetry represents itself as a radical critique of the dominant political/linguistic/philosophical/narrative/spiritual/economic power structures, I have never understood why it insistently explains itself in such jargon-enstrangled prose. In a recent article on Steve McCaffery (*Temblor*#6), Marjorie Perloff, a "language" supporter, claims that the "ugliness, the intentional ungainliness" of the prose written by McCaffery, Bernstein, Andrews, Dreyer, and Armantrout—she adds Silliman later, but forgets Watten—should be seen as a reaction against both the "genteel" art of the literary essay, as practiced by an Edmund Wilson or a Randall Jarrell (literature for the middle-brow nonspecialist) and the "casual speech-based, notebook or diary-style poetics of the Beats and New York poets." True perhaps, but these are hardly the only options: the century is full of models of radical critical prose: in English by Stein, Pound, Lawrence, Olson, and Susan Howe; in French by Tzara, Artaud, Bataille, and Leiris; or in Spanish by Huidobro, Lezama Lima, and Paz (to name only a few of the obvious).

Curiously, Perloff identifies the "genteel" style as "Oxbridge" and "Ivy League." "Oxbridge" it may remain, but it is no longer Ivy League. In fact,

the technocratic prose of the "language" poets is precisely the kind of writing practiced by the English Departments of the Ivy League, particularly Yale. The rise of "language" poetry occurs exactly at the moment when the English Department was split in two: one branch remaining as the Eng. Dept., and the other as the Creative Writing Program. What its detractors still label as "academic" poetry—the stuff published in *APR, Antaeus,* etc.—is the product of Creative Writing. I would argue that there are now two other "academic" poetries, which reflect, in turn, the warring old and new factions in the remaining Eng. Dept.: the new traditional prosodists (Leithauser, Gioia, et al) championed by *The New Criterion,* and the "language" poets, who are, many of them, the only literary practitioners of deconstruction. (Though ultimately there may be more similarities than differences between the two: aren't both the New Augustans?)

Of course few of them actually work full-time in the university, but by their wholesale acceptance of its critical tenets, as well as its prose style, specialized language, self-referentiality and disdain for the uninitiated, the "language" poets have formed their own autonomous English Department of the Spirit—and one, as might be expected, full of intradepartmental politics.

To my mind it is precisely this sectarianism—quite similar to certain ultra-factions of the New Left in the late 60s—that has led to the general ill-will felt toward "language" poets. When one picks up a "language" anthology or magazine, one knows exactly who will be included, who will be writing about whom, and in what manner. It is more predictable than *Antaeus.* There has been little attempt to widen the literary context in which the "language" poets locate themselves, or to explain themselves in what the hopelessly *demode* rest of the world considers as accessible prose. It is a kind of self-containment that would have been unimaginable to the most elitist of the modernists, who, after all, spent a great deal of time preaching to the unconverted.

3. Strangely enough, perhaps the most objective comment in my piece has drawn the loudest protests from readers. To repeat, of the 40 poets included in Silliman's *Tree* and the 80 "others"—largely unaffiliated avant-gardists—that he lists, only Rosmarie and Keith Waldrop (both "others") publish substantial poetry translations on a regular basis. This is of course absolutely true. A few of the others have done a few occasional translations, some of them excellent, but none of them are a significant means of access to a foreign poet or body of work. This situation is, as I wrote, general to the avant-garde, "langs" and non-"langs" alike, and has, I think, already proven detrimental.

Translation aside, naturally I recognize that "foreign writing has made its impact" on "language" poetry, if by "writing" one means "critical

theory"—a crucial difference. But it is obvious that foreign poetry—with the occasional exception of Russian Futurism—has not. If one calculated the total number of pages in *LANGUAGE, Tottel's, Roof, This,* etc. devoted in any way to foreign-language poetry, I doubt it would barely reach into two figures. To me, this is a self-absorption bordering on nationalism and xenophobia. How else do you explain the exclusion of even (gasp!) Canadian writers as essential to the movement as McCaffery and Dewdney from Silliman's *Tree* and the Messerli book? How else do you explain why Silliman's *Tree* is American at all? (Movement anthologies—Imagism, Others, Objectivism, etc.—are traditionally transnational, while remaining within the language. By limiting themselves to U.S. writers—and Silliman even divides his book into "East" and "West"—the two anthologists are, besides their aesthetic claims, implying that this is what's happening, and all that's happening, in the land.)

Furthermore, I have always been amazed that a movement so preoccupied with language shows no interest whatsoever in specific languages. It would, to take an obvious example, be extremely interesting to see a "language" response to Chinese poetry, which is dependent both on a multiplicity of meaning in the individual ideogram, and the placement of what were known as "empty" (meaningless) words. (And the groundwork is already there in François Cheng's *Chinese Poetic Writing.)* Or, say, something on Sanskrit (where, according to Ingalls, the sentence "Although she was embarrassed by the earnest glance of the king, still out of curiosity it was slowly that she walked away from him, looking backward as she walked" may be expressed in three words; where it is not uncommon for a word to have two or three hundred exact synonyms; where, without resorting to synonyms, a sentence like "Go get my horse" may be written fifteen different ways). Or, assuming they've all read Whorf, something on Native American or other indigenous languages. "Language" may have a few more women then previous movements, but it is still unrepentantly honkey in both its makeup and outlook.

4. In a similar vein, to claim that the "language" poets' "literary interests are broader than the English/American tradition" is stretching it. With the notable exception of Susan Howe (not a "language" poet), I see little evidence in their writings of much interest in the English/American tradition before the 20th century at all. (For example: 8 of the 464 pages of Bernstein's *Content's Dream* are on Blake and Shakespeare; in the 236 pages of Watten's *Total Syntax* there is a passing reference each to Coleridge and Dickinson.) The rediscovery or reevaluation of earlier poets was once essential to a personal poetics, whether one was Zukofsky or Eliot, Robert Duncan or Allan Tate. This has simply not occurred with any

of the "language" poets. (It's incredible that, after 15 years, no one has mentioned "language"'s greatest precursor: John Skelton.)

5. What I mean by the "non sequitur" is Cubist simultaneity, surrealist collage and the Poundian ideogrammic method in its decadent stage. Your "alternate forms of temporality," "critiques of narrative logic," etc. etc. were news around 1912 ("Zone"). Since then, "techniques of radical juxtaposition" may be the one distinguishing characteristic of nearly all "avant-garde" poetry written in this century. Fragments of a whole, however, quickly became a Utopic yearning for a whole. Now the "language" poets have exploded the myth of the whole, and what seems to be left is what television calls "bites": very short bits of glitzy images or catchy phrases that are dependent on immediate effect. A "language" poem in perhaps its most typical form begins, ends, and goes nowhere (utopia?) and consists of short wisecracks, epigrams, bits of slang or advertising slogans or popular songs, gnomic remarks, ironic references to suburban American culture, etc. etc. all held together by a glue of impenetrable declarative sentences or seemingly random word-lists. Some of the "bites" are arresting—and they usually turn up in the reviews of "language" poets. Many of the "bites" are funny. (Strange that their wit appears only in the poetry, never in the critical prose.) But in the end it seems to me no different from rock video, which the industry calls "moving wallpaper." Were it not for the ponderousness of its defensive prose, much of "language" poetry could easily be seen as a kind of moving-wallpaper literature for the current generation of grad students who were raised in front of the tube—a harmless entertainment not unlike the "7 types of ambiguity" poetry produced for students in the 1950s.

6. The "real agenda" of my article was not, as you imagine, world domination of literary production by the Lionel Trilling Cultural Brigade. Unlike critics and "language" poets, I have no agenda, and am opposed to all canon-formation. But I do believe that the concentration on "language" poetry, both for and against, has tended to drown out everything else on the aesthetic left. For the first time in twenty years, for example, I am aware of excellent poets who cannot get published in book form anywhere, large or small press—let alone discussed, even in the little magazines. There is an extraordinary range and variety of American poetry now being written—Silliman lists many of the younger writers in his preface, but where is the anthology for them?

To sketch out a personal and tentative map of the American workers: First, the many poets of *The New American Poetry* who are alive among us: Creeley, Duncan, Baraka, Ashbery, Snyder, Ginsberg, McClure, Eigner, Everson, Whalen, Oppenheimer, Levertov, Blaser, Guest, J. Williams,

Dorn, Lamantia (and those, still with us, who were left out at the time: Bronk, Corman, Rakosi). Some of these may be writing less well than they did then, but all are worth following.

Then, the generation which began publishing in book form in the 1960s: Rothenberg, Kelly, Eshleman, Ronald Johnson, MacLow, Antin, Irby, Sanders, Lansing, Coolidge, Tarn, most of whom are writing their best work in the 1980s.

Finally, the poets who have begun publishing in book form since 1970. Of them, three have already published a substantial body of work that strikes me as enduring: Michael Palmer, Susan Howe, and Gustaf Sobin. Other poets in this group who interest me, whose next books I look forward to reading, are Nathaniel Mackey, Karin Lessing, Rosmarie Waldrop, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Mark Karlins, Jed Rasula, Beverly Dahlen, John Yau, Bernadette Mayer, George Evans, Diane Glancy, Janet Rodney, Pierre Joris, Thomas Meyer, August Kleinzahler, Don Byrd, Jonathan Greene, Lyn Hejinian, John Thorpe, Kathleen Fraser, John Taggart, Marjorie Welish, Will Alexander, and—Michael Davidson. (To name only a few that immediately come to mind.)

This is of course a somewhat nutty list that reflects nothing more than one person's reading (and, in the age of overproduction, there is so much that is missed). But what stands out in the last group—beyond the strange combination of the barely and widely published—is the fact that most of these are in their 40s, or nearly so, and some are older. (The poets of *The New American Poetry* were largely in their 20s or early 30s.) Where are the young poets? They can't all be Writing School clones.

There seems to be an "aging" of poetry, matching the demographic aging of America. Take the little magazine, traditionally a young person's work: who else has the passion, the time, and the dedication for such drudgery? At the moment, the best poetry magazines are edited by people in their 40s and 50s: *Sulfur, Temblor, Hambone, (How)ever.* I know two interesting magazines with editors in their 30s, *Acts* and *House of K,* but I am unaware of any substantial national magazine run by anyone in her or his 20s.

To my mind, a revitalization of the American poetry "avant-garde" will only occur when the young appear with fresh readings of their living elders, rediscovering the neglected—think of all the "discoveries" of the 1960s: Niedecker, Oppen, Zukofsky, Loy, Reznikoff, Bunting, Rakosi, H.D.—and presenting themselves in the context of those they admire. A new generation of restless disciples that will pick up the threads of the "New American" poets, the *Caterpillar* generation and the isolated individuals who have emerged since. One that will want to discover all that's been happening in world poetry since American poets generally stopped translating. (And the place to start is Latin America.) One that will discover

its own models in the English/American tradition. And, most important, one that finds the world interesting, that sees the world as something more than a problematic text. Now that we've said that it can't be said, there are many other things to say.

All best—
ELIOT WEINBERGER

December 24, 1987

Dear Eliot,

Of course rhetoric is very much at the center of our disagreement. One of your big complaints is that language-writing is simply a belated form of modernist pastiche and has turned a radical avant-garde practice into "harmless entertainment." You claim that the use of the non sequitur in the hands of the language writers has been reduced to a kind of mindless play, a manipulation of "bits" of empty information to no particular end. Well, no "bit" is empty. It doesn't take a course in Semiotics to figure out that what we call History (you invoke it as though it were some Ozymandias-sized wreck out in the desert) "speaks" in the tongues of E.F. Hutton (or is it Shearson Lehman?). And the manipulation of those "bits" by certain language-writers is not empty either. Far from reveling in the culture industry (as you suggest they do), poets like Bob Perelman, Bruce Andrews, Ron Silliman and others, use various kinds of contrast and juxtaposition to draw out the darker implications of all kinds of cultural reference. By pointing to your own use of the disease metaphor I was simply trying to show how a single figure of speech may be used to serve two contrasting ideological positions. Without trying to impugn your metaphor I wanted to suggest that a critical use of non sequitur could, by eliminating conventional rhetorical connectives and subordination, call attention to the figural nature of things—and by extension to the ideological interests that metaphors serve.

Your attempt to redraw the literary map according to a more various and eclectic plan is an interesting divertissement, one that we could all perform for our amusement, but it hardly addresses the movement under question. Nor does it speak to the Silliman anthology in its claim to be representative of a given tendency. Artistic movements have never made their mark out of some consensus attitude, and in the early stages of their development

there is an inevitable tendency towards sectarianism. The battles over Patrarchanism versus "native meters" in the sixteenth century were hardly "catholic" (in any sense of the word); the history of Surrealism is the narrative of Breton's almost daily excommunications and exclusions; Imagism was largely a conversation among three persons (Vorticism added a couple more); and the influence of the Arensberg/Bloomsbury/Sitwell/27 Rue de Fleurus and any number of other modernist salons and circles were based not on how open they were but on whom had not been invited to tea. It is the strength—and often the tragic flaw—of literary movements to be narrow, if only to gain a readership in the first place. There are political reasons for this narrowness having to do with the monolithic nature of the publishing establishment in which innovation is immediately absorbed into advertising copy. And sectarianism has to do with the entropic nature of literary communities: once you try to accommodate everyone else's interests, you get. . .well, the Kiwanis Club. Much of the cohesive strength of a movement like Surrealism or Futurism had to do with its (real or imagined) embattled relation to the dominant culture. The Objectivists gained considerable impetus out of their disagreements with Imagism, just as Imagism defined itself against the Georgian verse it so often appeared to imitate. Would these important literary moments have been strengthened by the same kind of retrospective revisionism that you propose for the Silliman anthology? Without trying to justify the narrow focus of the Silliman anthology (I too regret the exclusion of Canadian writers like Dewdney and McCaffery), I recognize that it addresses a historically specific moment in postwar writing—and that is its value.

My main purpose in responding to your note was not to argue the strengths and weaknesses of language-writing; it was to draw attention to what I saw as a trivialization of historical processes by equating literary movements and complex political life in a relation of simple reflection. As we both would agree, Reaganism pervades all aspects of contemporary life, but it hardly follows that language writing replicates that influence because it uses some forms of non sequitur. This is to turn a fairly complex and diverse body of work (not to mention an enormously complicated political structure) into a unitary, mindless edifice. I think both art and politics are worth much more consideration than that.

Your alternative to the "depthless" writing of recent experimental verse is "culture," defined as those writers who translate on a regular basis—yourself, for example. But what kind of alternative does this offer anyway? Will "our" translations of foreign authors really help us understand oppression, abuses of power, sexism, racism, Reaganism? I know this is not your

avowed point, but it is implied in everything you say: that "words without history" must be revived through an infusion of the classics. (This, of course, was the other Eliot's point, and he was hardly a progressive.) As fervently as I believe in the positive effects of knowing "the tradition," I also believe that this very appeal (invoked as a self-evident truth) can prevent us from looking at the present—at the words that as yet have no history because they're in the process of being transformed right before our eyes. To deny *that* process is to perform a fatal oedipal act that will prevent us from seeing who is holding the sign.

Sincerely,
MICHAEL DAVIDSON

DUPLESSIS AND ESHLEMAN ON THE DAVIDSON/WEINBERGER EXCHANGE

18 Jan 1988: a letter among letters

[. . .] The critical enterprise of language poetry—the writing of analytic poetics—is a real and provocative achievement. LP activity has been distinguished by a great deal of critical prose, working papers, programmatic analyses, personal essays: some hard to read because sticky with self-indulgence, and others difficult, but serious, sometimes breathtaking, because attempting immediately to assimilate critical theory and philosophy to poetry. Which activity, in turn, has had some salutary effect on "Poetry" as an institution made sloppy by its unquestioned reliance on banalized romanticism. And as well—not making philosophy or theory the queen of the faculties—by working with the arts, popular culture, music, design, in a major "inter-art" analysis which does not scant political issues and stakes. The "marxistante" aspects of LP activity have always struck me as one of the more valuable (and permanently valuable) contributions being made by their work.

Of course, to continue the discussion of their critical assumptions, the differences between EW and MD do seem those of degree. But perhaps their greatest difference is in their tactic when faced with the militantly

Note: this piece was cut—signaled by [. . .]—from a letter of about twice this length. In the original, the interplay between italicized and plain text was an "organic" part of the statement made, something not thoroughly well reflected in this excerpt. RBD

organized LP movement of the past 15 years, what one might call "first phase" language-oriented poetries. *that's funny, that echo of Silliman is not meant to be ironic or coy* Eliot's tactic of isolating "Language Poetry" in part negatively mimics the practices of that group in the concerted creation of institutions of dissemination—journals, reading series, "talks" series; in contrast, Michael tends to, and wants to recuperate and blend "Language Poetry" beyond some of its own self-defined and maintained borders.

Perhaps their largest similarity is that Michael, like Eliot, wants to make a political/cultural analysis, with just a greater degree of emphasis (in MD) on aesthetic experiences and worlds. He poses plural origins for literary phenomena, is ready with multiplicities of influences, affiliations, and traditions and then Eliot responds with his own *I've always been startled, fascinated, put off? by how neatly male writers construct originating genealogies as part of their critical analyses how that tactic fixes and defines "ink" lines, lines of descent this one "out of" that one you know it may be true but it's a funny procedure*

Michael also claims a critical/oppositional function for innovative (non-transparent) rhetorical and poetic tactics, but he leaves ambiguous, as this kind of analysis often does, what is the impact of rhetoric and writing ON real centers of power. This ambiguity is not unique to Michael; in fact, it is the centerpiece in Jameson's *Political Unconscious*. Probably the strongest difference between them is in their degree of tolerance for the claims of so organized a literary movement: Eliot seeing real trouble in some of the sour episodes involving group vs. others *he would not call these "episodes" would see them as having a revelatory significance* and Michael not alluding to or glossing those episodes at all (e.g. with the Messerli anthology).

One of the characteristics of writers like Silliman and Bernstein in their role as critics (those I mention are those I have read) is to have produced a concerted, intended, intelligent analysis of literary movements and literary reception, indeed of all aspects of the complex of activities—production, dissemination, reception/consumption—in their social, political, historical contexts. The way most professional (academic) literary criticism has been stratified not only divides these terms, but also valorizes certain aspects of production under the aegis of artist=genius and ignores or de-contextualizes the literary processes that go beyond writing artworks, as if those works were just magically "always" "already" appreciated in "universally human" ways. In an academic setting, marxist, feminist, 3rd world, and popular culture analyses have altered that situation somewhat. But this kind of LP analysis parallels and is related to important work in phrasing an adequate literary history. This is a notable achievement.

It is then actually striking that theory and praxis worked so sternly together for LP cultural workers: a group—or set of related groups—maintained itself for about 15 years of work. As a devotee of working cohorts rather than declared and centered groups, I regard this activity with curiosity and amazement tempered with suspicion at the self-limiting aspects of any concerted enterprise. *but look at me anyway; the only club I've signed up for recently has been Woolf's Society of Outsiders* [. . .]

So the critical and oppositional prospectus offered in language poets' "working papers" are among the most useful and provocative documents of and in contemporary writing. They have called up, for examination, all that makes writing "writing" and reading "reading." Thematic organization, centered, unquestioned self, how to speak let's say with narrative cues, clues and some assumptions, but without narrative teleology, the use of ideolects, dialects and discourses, the means, principles, and mechanisms of writing practice and rhetoric (no matter how assumed and naturalized) (like how a book "looks" and a book "is." like typography, like syntax o yes like syntax like sequencing like cause and effect). All this laying bare the device is exhilarating

and difficult hard to read hard to assimilate not depending on conventionalized "pleasures" the pleasure is critical but I know this kind of debate from my own parallel practice as a feminist writer.

What a strange medium to be using that everyone talks and writes and sings and consumes. Which would be to find, of course, yr medium filled with an almost paralyzing set of cultural allusions and discourses of race and gender, of political quietism and war-mongering at once. *must break it up, examine every jot and tittle; get back of line, rhythm, punctuation, syntax, must get into, crack that surface of the already said, the already accepted because in that seem to be contained those seeds of, those nets of hegemonies which I would unsettle*

There are a few questions I have about the creative work of language writers (of course knowing, liking, that one of the vital parts is the flux between document and poem; essay and "story" the erasure of the difference between creative and critical writing) (as in a parallel way in Beverly Dahlen's) but I mean those things that look like poems, or prose format image-laden writing. What do they do with pleasure? what do they do about transcendence? what do they do with understanding community? How do they negotiate specific rises of passionate feeling passionate nodules of feeling and agglomerated psycho-political force in language how do they negotiate feeling without romantic transcendence? For even the investigation of lateral dailiness and the centerless sense of everything marginal and parallel is a quest of pleasure and passion. It is like saying—for them, is there mystery? Is there the political and psychic strangeness of writing a poetry out of the disasters of the 20th century:

shards of language, shards of meaning, and, tragically, shards of people. So then, if not the impossible, discredited transcendence—something else, for which there is little consensus on the name. Oppen called it the "numerous." By a familiar pun, one finds, even in the moments of absence, the numinous as well, a numinous which compels even if we all understand that no promise—even possibility—of coherence is its occasion.

It is worth wondering why—in EW's excellent point—Susan Howe and Michael Palmer (putting Clark Coolidge aside as differing) are "resorted to" as he unglamorously puts it. It has something to do with the ways they "solve" the issue of unconcessive metonymy by (aside from thematic nodules) a sense of a vertical dimension (Oppen's term) of awe, wonder, mystery, alarm at what IS: what is historically, culturally. Both—this is a little bald but will have to do—try to reassimilate certain symbolist evocations to an objectivist rhetoric, Palmer sometimes almost forensically. By symbolist, I include "allegorical" in the way Craig Owens / Bob Glück pursue this term: appropriation, marking, overwriting, layering of historically distinctive discourses. I find S. Howe (whose work I know best) is a measure of what is, as yet, missing from language writing, which would be: the release of rhetoric from the thrall of the incessant = = = = = so allegorically registered in the name of one notable journal.

Transcendence has often been conventionally negotiated in that mono-logic, monochromatic discourse which Bakhtin calls characteristic of poetry. And it is that language use that language poetries have, happily, participated in rupturing; (tho not at issue here, probably the major contribution of African-American writers to this project of pluralizing discourses in poetry should not go unstated). Like the famous character who talked "en prose" it is a terrific thing for poetry, not only for the novel, to discover that we are using various discourses, historically occasioned and situated. In fact, the unpoeticizing of poetry may be a mission—actually a common struggle—shared by most of the people here disagreeing. The question is how to find and to figure or represent value when certain conventional forms/forces of value—the epiphany, the appeal to transcendence, myth, Poetry as an Ideal, the Poet as a Figure, not to say Poetic Diction—are sidelined or equalized with a blast. These discourses, if evoked at all, have to lose their aura, and take their chances in "the real world." By that I mean resituating the upper limits of poetic diction, yearning, transcendence among a number of other discourses, rather than as the culmination or crown of language. Idealizing poetry is a useless gesture. One of the problems of LP is that this issue is often faced with ironizing or distancing strategies which are privileged as, presumably, no discourse/mode or tone should be privileged, in the logic of their position. *I am not sure of some of that but seems necessary to say it, to take my chances and say it, to see what will happen where it gets me in thinking* [. . .]

There is a further irony in the site and conduct of this apparent debate that a writer like Charles Bernstein or Bob Perelman comes out of the "dialogic" analyses of Bakhtin, while a writer like Eshleman comes out of Bakhtin's analysis of the grotesque and carnivalesque.

[. . .] One of the extraordinary strains of reading echt L=A=N=G (etc.) poetry has something to do, perhaps, with those eye-catching equal signs (which, I have not deployed in writing this, but which are part of their history and ours). Unconcessive metonymy, and the a-syntactic space between the equalized materials, and the jar or crack as different things hit into, or are collaged against each other has been a problem—as well as an advantage—which haunts modern and contemporary innovative writing. Pound solved it by "bursting thru" *or was that "busting thru" anyway it's quite a performative metaphor all by itself* to haunting, luminous and completely traditional versions of images of paradise (especially light and water, and those in an eroticized shimmer) for which he claimed "they cohere, even if my notes (i.e. metonymic registers) do not cohere." Williams solved it by the temporal (narrativized?) proposal and accumulation of thematic nodules and clusters, his strategy of "rolling up" in *Paterson*. Creeley solved it by a primary gender narrative of asymmetry: postulating man as "living" in the postmodern era of the shifting "I" and decentered subject, but woman "living" in a traditional (pre-modern?), mythic/humanist era and giving us *I mean women my gender* the responsibility for telos and value.

Where Eliot is clearly helpfully right is to ask the challenging question: if dissociated, paratactic writing, in Michael's excellent terms "alternate forms of temporality," is in fact a characteristic of all experimental 20th century writing, clearly we need more than the constantly repeated, approving evocation of these, and similar, terms (like defamiliarization) to make further distinctions among writers. Some major rhetorical and stylistic study of 20th century innovative poetry has to occur which includes analysis of its context, of its historical functions, of its political as well as poetic meanings. And its impact on the reader—degrees of readability in some ratio with degrees of critique.

I am separating Eliot's question from his answer. Eliot has made an organicist historical paradigm (language writing is in a "decadent stage" of 20th century writing) and has proposed a generic analogy: consumer culture's TV "bites." The question is vital; I am agnostic about the answers, one for its "decadent"—not sure this term can function fruitfully as a historical analysis of style, and the other for its apocalyptic use of popular culture. [. . .]

The debate between Language Poetry and others, if it were to be carried to an extreme, would make me think warily of sectarianism on the left—2 little groupuscules at unspeakable odds over certain important

issues, while all around them power is shared between smarmy liberals and neofascist reaction. The analogy? why are certain *Sulfur* eds. (—not a group) and LP defenders (LP clearly was, is, could still be a group) grappling, while all around garrulous bevies of white bread and dead muskrat poets banally implode. To use terms approximately like Silliman's: the mutually interested co-existence of poetry communities which have a radical political-aesthetic agenda is of some import. The uneasy hyphen is an exacting signal of unfinished debates—but they are not sterile debates, having to do with the relationship of hopes/struggles for social justice and the forms and functions of writing. Of writing as and in resistance. Just think what a fine anthology some "we" could make if we stood together in differences, in the pluralism of constructive experiment. That would be the anthology to counter incessantly "prize winning" "poets." A new anthology: of the analytic lyric, of the working work—work generative, work of contestation from the multiple communities of contestation, work whose assumptions are made and challenged in the course of, and in the form of writing.

—RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS

Weinberger is right about the lack of track records based on translating either on a regular basis or doing a complete job on a single author (Hejinian, for example, is not an exception yet to what Eliot claims; while she has been translating Dragomoshchenko on a regular basis for several years, to my knowledge less than 30 pages of this work have appeared in print). There are a number of foreign poetries that should have drawn Language Poet translation interest: the Vallejo of *Trilce*, post-1945 Artaud, Heisenbuttel, DuBouchet, Daive, several of the Italian Novissimi—all are in varying ways tangential to Language Poetry concerns but most are also larger and more poetically ample than I take the Language "concentrate" to be: e.g., to become involved with the totaled syntax of *Trilce* is immediately to become involved with issues that lie outside the concentrate.

Davidson does not justify the lack of Language Poetry involvement with the "other" by proposing that a particular group of foreign theorists "occupy prominent positions in critical essays by language-writers." To make use of a foreign critic to reinforce one's own poetics is a gesture of a different order than making available several hundred pages of foreign

literature. Translation, on the scale of a Rexroth, Blackburn, or Waldrop, mixes American esthetic identity with that which counters it. We all read to appropriate material for our own workings; the translator goes a step further by making a gift to the reader outside his own poetry. The Language Poets' failure to make such gestures parallels their refusal to engage American poetries that differ from or argue with their own.

TV does not seem simply non sequitur to me. Situation comedy, soap opera, detective farce, while as empty as a Reagan speech, refer to "life out there," and at least theoretically employ cause and effect. Poetrywise, they are closer to Confessional Poetry (and its diluted extensions) than to Language Poetry. On the other hand, the use of image in advertising does relate to Language Poetry, in as much as a TV image (or splash of music) can represent anything: two "lovers" looking into each others' eyes are only there to sell wine, travel, or perfume. They do not contextualize a real human exchange, and thus are non- or arbitrarily-referential. No longer moored to a psychological or realistic world, they are so much flotsam or P.R. for salvation through consumerism.

The concentrate or glue that binds the Language "community" up to this point involves separating out of syntax both an inner and an outer world, so that, in Watten's phrase, syntax becomes "total." Denotative and connotative fields are raised to the exclusion of a context in which language directly engages experience. Visually speaking, such activity reminds me of photos I have seen in which a plethora of signs (Self Service Eat Here Stop-n-Go Turn Left Elect Carter) have filled the visual frame. The buildings to which the signs presumably have been attached (or to which they refer), the ground into which they have been pounded, are obscure. The signs float, and seem to total the atmosphere.

In Messerli's quote-studded Introduction to *"Language" Poetries,* language itself is defined as "engenderer of experience," "source of experience," "medium of consciousness," "perception," "a communality" and "perception itself." But language is not the source of my experience; it is a mediational tool that is a result of symbol making, and symbol making itself is anchored in my foetushood. Language is a kind of slippery taffy that I use to wire the outer to the inner—I intend the complicated metaphor here, because there is no consensual agreement as to the origin of language, or to the extent to which it is the origin of anything. Language is my enemy as much as it is my friend; I am at its mercy, I did not choose it, at the same time it is my terrible weapon (my male power to name), and I intuitively view it as a kind of nuclear power. When I look into my soul, when I dream, when I feel my affiliation with and estrangement from my imagination of a center, language is not there. In contrast to being felt as a source, I experience language more like cinders or rocks that I daily break my teeth on.

At the point when all living forms are not only identified but in harmonious relationship, art, as we know it, will cease. Until then, art essentially respects the reality principle even if, in vision, it asserts that it is not so (Blake is always arguing that reality is created, not observed, but his argument is weighted with the anguish of its contradiction—and I think that is one of the reasons that we still read him). There is no way to advance an avant-garde art if you argue that any particular power or presence accounts for *everything* else. The conflict between the inside and the outside must be respected, if for no other reason than that there are millions of sons of bitches out there (as Williams put it near the end of his life) who want to have done once and for all with the human spirit.

At the point you assert that language is the source of experience, you might as well say: language is God. The distinction between the significant and the insignificant blurs, and a kind of grey limbo wells up between, for example, my manhood and Salvador. Both manhood and Salvador contract into words. Messerli states: "writing becomes a political action." How is this so? Has he examined the implications of such a statement? In some substratum of the unconscious, everything appears to be of equal significance. LSD is instructive here: at moments under LSD every sound, sight, fart, nod, cloud movement signified, but it was an inarticulate signification because once voiced the signifiers belonged to the sensation and did not act as an interface between the experience and another being.

Since according to Silliman Language Poets do not want to be called anything, how might we respect this request and, at the same time, seek an image by which to identify the concentrate that has drawn many of these writers into a community? In his Introduction to the *Ironwood* "Realism" anthology of "'Language' Writing" (in which there is no discussion of realism), Silliman refers to the poets in Don Allen's *The New American Poetry* as "the New Americans." Presumably he feels his label is apt and correct. Thus, doing away with his unwanted label of "language," I propose that the contributors to *In the American Tree* be called the Treed Americans.

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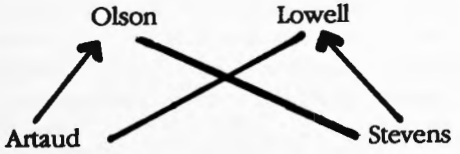
For the past week, I have awakened at 5 AM with the following configuration in mind:



Admittedly, a subjective tetrad, but perhaps one way to start thinking about certain imaginative formations in the 20th century. Artaud and Stevens represent, for me, extremes in the mastery of revelation and sublimation (it might be argued that these powers define the traditional activities of the avant-garde and the establishment). It is time that one of the earliest definitions of the avant-garde be brought to bear on counter-establishment writing. In 1848, Gabriel-Desire Laverdant, a Fourierist, wrote that its function was to "lay bare with a brutal brush all the brutalities, all the filth, which are at the base of society." Reflecting on these words in his book-length essay on Leon Golub, Donald Kuspit observed that "it has been forgotten that the brutal revelation of brutal reality—a mimesis that necessarily employs brutal techniques—is the central idea of the avant-garde which has degenerated into a notion of esthetic revolution."

At the time that Artaud and Stevens did their most definitive work (the mid-late 1940s), they represented a fierce oppositionalism that seems to have weakened in world poetry by the late 1950s/early 1960s. My sense is that had they met, Artaud would have screamed at Stevens, and that Stevens would not have responded.

Olson and Lowell, in spite of massive differences in methodology and adherences, seem closer than Artaud and Stevens; I can at least imagine them in debate. Both seem related to the earlier figures in the following ways:

In Olson's case, Artaud's fervor for a presentday reality in which the material and religious worlds are fused, has weakened to an obsession with origins (in 1936 Artaud went to the Mexican Tarahumaras, a still existent Neolithic civilization; 15 years later, Olson went to Yucatan to investigate Maya ruins). In Lowell's case, Stevens' interior richness made possible by the sealed vessel of sublimation, has become the leaky vessel of personal misery. Looking at Lowell through Artaud, the spectre of revelation appears to be confession. Looking at Olson through Stevens, the spectre of sublimation appears to be a focus on the past. While *Life Studies* and *The Distances* argue opposing esthetic positions, I think both Lowell and Olson felt quite similar about the quality of life in presentday America.

Neither Artaud nor Stevens have offsprings—for utterly different reasons, both are too individualistic and barbed to be imitatable. On the other hand, both Olson and Lowell offer perspectives that have heavily determined the sensibility of several generations of poets.

Such a configuration suggests that as the century matures, the avant-garde and the establishment lose their clear-cut oppositionalism and move closer to each other, while at the same time the increasing perilous conditions of life bend them even further away from each other as an obsession with the personal life becomes the alternative to an obsession

with how did we get in such a fix (leading to research on the origin of civilization), and vice-versa.

It seemed possible to me in the late 1960s that a responsible avant-garde in poetry could become the dominant focus of the 70s and 80s (as such figures as Bacon, Kitaj, Golub and Petlin testify has happened in painting). By "responsible" I mean not only the inventiveness of Olson and Robert Duncan, but their erudition and responsiveness to the human condition at large. Olson died in 1970, and two years earlier, Duncan committed himself to 15 years of publishing silence. With these two strong figures absent, as a conservative cycle began to turn against the Aquarian-LSD-Vietnamese War Protest-Revolution cycle of the 60s, Lowell's progeny flooded the scene and softened his genuine unhappiness to a workshop-respectable and endlessly repetitive display of self-sensitivity. Unlike painting, poetry has been housed in the universities, and in contrast to the indifference to the "new" I encountered in the English Department in the late 50s, via the some 300 writing programs today there is an active opposition to it, with a concomitant supportive network for the kind of poetry students can learn to write in a few years.

At the point the poets in the American Tree were making their formative decisions, they were confronted by an establishment image of a chatty, polite, Lowellian ego (without Lowell's robust if descriptive line), the anonymous poetry that represents the past 25 years in the textbook anthologies. It is too simple to say that the Treed Americans plucked a few lessons from a few of the "New Americans," utterly turned their backs on everything they associated with the children of Lowell and then went into a huddle, but something like this seems to have happened. Their crucial miscalculation, as I see it, and one which particular figures are now recalculating, is to have made across-the-board judgements on such matters as ego, self, story, myth, narrative etc. While "I" may be predictable and boring in William Stafford's poetry, it is hardly predictable or boring in Artaud, Spicer, Kelly, or Padgett. When it comes right down to it, the only ones of us who will be read—if this matters—in the 21st century are those who will have forged an unforgettable personal voice, no matter how impersonal such a "voice" may appear to be. The individual in all literary movements and communities suffers the concentrate of the movement itself, and sometimes (as in the case of the Surrealists), it is only in revolt against the hardened concentrate that second generation figures emerge as powerful poets on their own.

As editor of *Sulfur,* I have worked to present some of the Treed Americans in a context that they do not dominate, so that those who participate in the Tree but are not obscured by it (e.g., Palmer, Howe, DuPlessis, Rasula), or those who most purely and intelligently represent the

Tree (e.g., Bernstein, Silliman, Hejinian), can be read as part of a range of poetries including, of course, foreign poetries.

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In a letter sent to the *Sulfur* masthead, Rasula lists a few questions that he would like response to.

For those of us who were active in the late 60s, the present counter-establishment scene is paltry indeed. The bulk of the thoughtful critical writing has been by the Treed upon the Treed. Non-tree non-academic poets who began to publish in the 70s have, to my knowledge, published very little critical prose. The poetry readership (bought, reviewed, "prized" books) appears to be primarily controlled by the university workshop constellation; 19 year students are introduced to poetry via the textbook anthologies which present post WWII American poetry as the domain of Confessionalist writing with token minority representation. The poetry reading, in contrast to the political statement it made in cafes etc., in the 50s and 60s, has become institutionalized and sedate. Of the poets Weinberger lists who "began publishing in book form in the 1960s," only a few of us have our best work in print and none of us have received significant review or critical attention. If manuscripts are circulating, I must say that I see very few of them (other than material submitted to *Sulfur*, the reading of which soaks up most of my reading time). Like most American counter-establishment poets I think, I feel that I inhabit a small island at best tangential to a few others. This is not entirely bad, for because of the isolation, I have had to develop my own areas of research, such as Upper Paleolithic cave art, and via foreign poetries a feel for what might be thought of as the international scene of the past 50 years.

Someone should point out that viewed from Peru or Czechoslovakia, American poets have nothing to complain about. In fact, I think it could be argued that the extent of our poet professorships, awards, archival purchases, and publishing outlets have homogenized us, and that we are, as a nation, a family of quarreling, unsatisfiable rich kids who have to a considerable extent lost the solitude and difficulties that have contributed to some of the finest world poetry over the past 100 years.

My main sense of "what to do now" involves several things. Given the twin dilemma of origins vs. the personal life struck by the Olson/Lowell image, I think both forces should be pushed to the hilt—we must try to imagine the rudiments of Homo Sapiens mind as well as ruthlessly investigate the self (my hunch is that a powerful imagination may find these forces complexly coded in the one remaining untapped citadel—the lower body).

I would personally like to dismantle all of the writing workshop programs and send the students abroad to wander with a backpack of text

among strangers. Obviously this is not possible, because the writing programs have massively caught on, I think partially because of TV replacing serious reading. Might there be a generation now in their twenties who will navigate between the Grounded Academic scene and the Treed Americans, bringing to bear upon poetry a densely-woven grain of mythological intelligence, political awareness, and American reality? A crucial component of such a move would involve American minority poets ceasing to monolithically identify themselves with their own minority background, and starting to cannibalize every tradition they can get their hands on (Aimé Césaire a model in this respect).

Is it possible that Eliot's *The Wasteland* (1922) and Palmer's *Sun* (1987) bookend the postmodern period, and that as of 1988 we should begin to think millennially? As we face the Gate of 2000, perhaps we should be re-imagining Apocalypse, Incarnation, and the role of the Goddess in world culture.

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN
4 January 1988

A FINAL RESPONSE

Literary movements have traditionally had three functions: First, the criticism of the prevailing aesthetic, which is usually the aesthetic of the preceding generation. Second, the proposal of a new aesthetic and the promotion of its practitioners. Third, the introduction of other, historical or foreign, work: discoveries of neglected masters in the same language, new readings or translations of well-known texts, translations of the previously untranslated. This third function is both a service to the community and a means of historical or international validation for the new aesthetic: a new context in which to locate the new. Thus, a tiny movement like Imagism simultaneously soured the appreciation of late 19th century texts, promoted a handful of new poets, and forever changed the way classical Greek and Chinese poems were read and translated. Thus, one of the projects of a huge movement like Surrealism—which revolutionized taste on all aesthetic fronts—was the introduction of a wide range of non-Western texts: Latin-American writers, to take a small example, had to go to Paris in the 1920s to "discover" pre-Columbian oral and written literature. Thus, the one truly enduring aspect of the New Criticism may well be its bringing of the metaphysical poets back onto the map.

The members of the "language" movement have been hyperactive in fulfilling the first two functions. They have attempted to dismantle the prevailing aesthetic—what Ron Silliman, in his MLA (of course!) paper modestly calls "the naive assumption of speech, individualism or 'beauty.'" They have tirelessly promoted a new aesthetic and its practitioners. What they haven't done is bring any other (non-critical) writings into the fold. This is not to suggest that they are individually ill-read—far from it. But in their voluminous writings and public speeches, they have generally ignored everyone except themselves, a few non-affiliated contemporaries, and the French and German critics currently fashionable among art critics and English professors. "Language," for me at least, would be an exciting and genuinely challenging movement if it presented its own idiosyncratic historical "canon," revisionary readings of the classics, discoveries of lost masters, bridges to previously unknown foreign poets, commentaries not only on language but on languages. This has simply not occurred as a collective effort.

To my mind there have been four movements (or tendencies or constellations) in America since 1960 which have not only produced important poetry, but have been extraordinarily enriching for those not active in the group:

—The black nationalist poetry of the 1960s, which, besides its political agenda, effectively admitted black speech into poetry (something the Harlem Renaissance, with the notable exception of Hughes, had refused to do), created a large and genuinely populist audience for poetry, had a close and exciting working relationship with jazz and some rock musicians (still extant, in pop form, as rap and hip-hop), offered scathing commentaries on white "verse," and brought in a great deal of African and Afro-American history, mythology and religion which had previously been absent in American poetry.

—The poetry written and read against the Vietnam War, that unique moment when American poets served as citizens, witnesses, intellectual consciences of the nation (a role that poets routinely perform elsewhere on the planet). Most important, a moment when political necessity compelled a settling of differences among the poetry communities: not only between academic and non-academic, but among the non-academics. (It has been forgotten, especially by Silliman, that the Donald Allen anthology was intended as a peaceable kingdom for the bitterly warring factions of the anti-establishment: though it is difficult for us to sort out now, the Black Mountains hated the Beats and so on and so on.) The readings and anthologies against the War were a truly democratic vision of a republic of letters, and, as Clayton Eshleman says above, seemed to portend a "responsible avant-garde" for the post-Vietnam years.

—Ethnopoetics—essentially an American revision and expansion of Surrealism— which not only introduced a tremendous amount of indigenous material, but also presented a re-reading of American literature, discovered all sorts of strange and forgotten poets, emphasized oral performance and poetry rituals and talismans, translated a great deal of European modernist poets, offered new theories and practices of translation, and, perhaps most of all, proposed an image of the poet, based on the archaic, as a vital, necessary member of the community.

—Finally, the women poets who are currently centered around the magazine *HOW(ever)*. After the isolated work of Dickinson, H.D., Loy, Stein and Niedecker, it is a concentrated and collective effort to challenge the inherited (patriarchal) language, invent a feminine and feminist language of poetry and new modes of criticism, reread and reconsider the entire history of poetry, and raise the pioneer women modernists to their rightful positions of importance. To my mind this is the most exciting group activity occurring in American poetry today. (Though one that desperately needs more periodical outlets.)

What these four movements have given me is a tremendous sense of worlds opening up. (And I should emphasize that I am speaking of group activity as a sum of all the individual efforts involved—obviously no single individual can do everything.) That black nationalism and ethnopoetics have produced no viable second generations, and that the Vietnam War poetry led nowhere, is, for me, the great disaster of American poetry in the late 1970s and 1980s.

(Given the current obsession with criticism—Silliman's italicized "writing itself is not sufficient for completeness in poetry" being the latest pronouncement—it should be said that all of these movements have promoted "critical thinking," though their rhetoric bears no resemblance to "language" discourse. And Silliman is way off when he states that the "New Americans" were against critical thinking: true perhaps of Corso or Ferlinghetti, but Duncan, Olson, Creeley, Levertov, Dorn, Jones/Baraka, Snyder, Sorrentino? All published at least one book of critical essays, and many of the others wrote isolated articles.)

On the other hand, what "language" as a movement has given me is the sense of worlds being closed off. That reductionist label "language" or "language-centered" says it all. One can only imagine how they will react to Rachel Blau DuPlessis, in her statement above, raising words like "pleasure," "transcendence," "passion," "feeling."

For me, a model of the life and work of a poet was Robert Duncan, who died yesterday—a poet who embraces all the words on Rachel's list and much more: curiosity, pluralism, history, indignation, spirituality, social and moral accountability. I have never gotten over the first (now famous)

words of Duncan's that I ever read, in the first *Caterpillar,* 21 years ago: "The drama of our time is the coming of all men into one fate. . ." and his dream of a "symposium of the whole" where all "the old excluded orders must be included: the female, the proletariat, the foreign; the animal and vegetative; the unconscious and unknown; the criminal and failure." That Duncan found no room at his symposium for the "language" poets—even though nearly all of them stand in opposition to nearly all of his beliefs—was, I think, a mistake. A symposium of general agreement is no symposium at all.

—ELIOT WEINBERGER

THE RHETORIC OF MATERIALITY

I. Talk of Death

> Excrement is the dead life of the body.
> Norman O. Brown

> The spectacle is the life of what is dead, moving within itself.
> Guy Debord

In its cryptic and prodigal fashion, language poetry expresses a *nostalgie de boue;* that is to say, it concerns the death of poetry as a medium.[1] Yet language poetry, by appellation and adherence to the look (the gaze) of poetry, refuses to acknowledge the inscrutable death that lies at its heart. What's more, the lost object (poetry) which it seeks to keep alive within itself, is its own corpse. Language poetry, then, is both an "exquisite corpse" and its own crypt, a place where death is concealed and protected (from what, from whom?). The great failing of language poetry is its inability to preserve itself *as other,* as dead. It can only mourn and therefore love the dead (poetry, itself) as a living part of itself. It refuses to finish itself off.

The specularity of language poetry (its prolific nature, its belatedness, its cryptic enunciation of its own death) is characteristic of a recent trend in the arts towards revivalism and anachronism.[2] The most advanced

painting and poetry reinscribes, or simulates, certain features of the historical avant-garde. Yet, the work produced by these specular movements is haunted by a powerful sense of distraction, as if its gaze were averted from a medusal object, a glimpse of its own mortality. More specifically, language poetry has assumed the purgatorial task of producing a cryptonymous account of its own death.[3] The death of the medium of poetry is encrypted, that is, sealed from view and made unintelligible, by "overwriting," the palimpsestic logic that governs much of language poetry. The illegibility of the work is not proof of its meaninglessness—on the contrary, it should be understood as the garbled trace of a meaning so powerful and so contradictory that it must be repressed: the death of poetry. (I am not concerned with the end of poetry, but with its death, its disappearance into unknowing.)

The term "language" in language poetry is, of course, abusive, rigorously abusive; it is an icon (it does what it says)—an originary moment of catachresis, meaning something like the pre-history of language, or language as the end of history. Language poetry wants to free the word from as many discursive and ideological constraints as possible. It strives for an "absence of means" (in Bataille's phrase), the elimination of the medium, of any discursive convention that mediates the material presence of the word. This orientation sustains one of the most prominent features of modernist discourse: an emphasis on the material and graphic properties of the sign. (Barthes: "what pleasure wants is the site of a loss," i.e., a loss of meaning, if meaning is understood as being captive to the requirements of signification.)[4] Language poetry should thus be understood as a belated contribution to a persistent, modernist rhetoric of materiality, whose utopian desire is to extract the word from its semiotic and ideological matrix, in order to plunge it into the *jouissance* of pure materiality. (And let us not forget our homegrown edition of the same: the Beats. See Deleuze on "The Superiority of Anglo-American Poetry.")[5]

Earlier I spoke of language poetry expressing a *nostalgie de boue:* not merely a longing for filth and ecstatic release (both formally and politically), but a penchant for anachronism. Indeed, what distinguishes language poetry from earlier projects concerned with materiality is its disclosure of the inscrutable relation between filth and death in the medium of poetry (as the epigraphs to this article suggest). As poetry approaches an irreducibly graphic limit, as the verbal image disintegrates in its quest for greater immediacy, the fascination with the most radical (i.e., excremental) forms of materiality is revealed to be a fascination with death. The scatological rhetoric of modernists such as Bataille, Benjamin, and Pound turns to talk of death (always garbled) and the work of mourning in language poetry.

II. Imagery and Excrement

> Eternity is far more the rustle of a dress
> than an idea
>
> Walter Benjamin

To begin to understand the process of "mortification" (Benjamin's term) and cryptonymy at work in language poetry, one must return to the writings of Benjamin, Bataille, and Pound. During the 1930s, all three men made important efforts to formulate an epistemology of the image and a materialist practice of discourse. In each of these projects, the idea of verbal and graphic imagery emerges as a crucial figure in the rhetoric of materiality, along with the ideas of trash and excrement. The projects of all three men, of course, were deeply affected by the rise of fascism and the political turmoil of the thirties. Yet, in each case, the theoretical and practical models which they brought to bear on political discourse were derived from earlier developments in artistic practice (such as montage, the shock effect of surrealism, and Pound's concept of the ideogram). This suggests, first of all, a volatile relation between political discourse and artistic practice at both ends of the political spectrum. (Benjamin seems not to have taken to heart his own warning about the danger of aestheticizing politics.) It also suggests, given the disparity of the political identities of the three men, that the rhetoric of materiality held a powerful appeal for cultural criticism emerging from both Marxist and fascist orientations. Indeed, the critical focus of the projects of all three men is an unrelenting attack on abstract rationality.

Let's start with Pound, since any attempt to associate him with Bataille, or even Benjamin, is bound to raise a few eyebrows. What has Pound to do with Benjamin's apocryphal blend of surrealism and Marxism? And isn't it true that Pound's economics and poetics attempt to exclude precisely those values and dimensions of language which Bataille exploits? I will argue, on the contrary, that the image, as a figure of radical materiality and the emblem of a graphic poetics, unites the work of these three men, and that Pound's conception of the verbal image, formulated between 1912 and 1918, anticipates the projects of Bataille and Benjamin.

It is not necessary to do violence to Pound's conception of the image in order to glean from it a rhetoric of materiality. In fact, one need only examine the astonishingly inventive and perverse ensemble of figures which Pound offered in an attempt to define "the" image, to discover a powerful and contradictory defense of materiality. Inspired by the move toward abstraction in the visual arts (cubism and expressionism, in particular), Pound conceived of the word as a graphic image, a symptom of the "real." The risk of choosing the image as an emblem of representa-

tional authority and exactitude was, of course, immediately evident. Pound must have known that his project to establish an absolute standard of signification through the image was bound to fail. The inherent specularity of the image—its belatedness, its prolific nature—appeared immediately in Pound's attempts to define it: not only could he not offer a literal definition of the image, but his figures for it multiplied endlessly. The basic principles of imagism (economy, precision, clarity) were violated in the very act of defining the image.

In his memoir of the sculptor Gaudier-Brzeska, Pound speaks of the image as a "revival of realism," a mask, translation, metaphor, a Freudian "complex," an ideogram, and a vortex. This compendium of figures leaves no doubt that his conception of the image is "profoundly cracked" (to use a phrase of Bataille's). It is schismatic because it inherits the wildly contradictory notions and attitudes about imagery which characterize Western intellectual history. Simultaneously idolatrous and iconoclastic, Pound's understanding of the image oscillates between the strictly representational (a revival of realism) and the militantly non-representational (ideogram and vortex). It is the latter end of the spectrum, where the verbal image is stripped of its discursive properties, that pertains to the projects of Bataille and Benjamin.

Pound said, "The image is not an idea. It is a radiant node or cluster; it is what I can, and must perforce, call a VORTEX, from which, and through, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing."[6] It is a mark of the dialectical power of Pound's understanding of the image that the series of displacements from metaphor to ideogram to vortex can be read as either a sublimation of the image, or a de-idealization of it. On the one hand, this evolution constitutes a progressive attenuation and abstraction of the inherent sensuality of the mimetic image. From this standpoint, the image abandons entirely its representational function; it reaches its fulfillment in the figure of the vortex, a metamorphic structure that converts ideas from aliment to excrement. On the other hand, the same evolution can be seen as a progressive liberation of the material properties of the mimetic image, a shattering of discursive constraints, a withdrawal from meaning. In this case as well, the image abandons its representational function, but this time the loss coincides with a radical extension of mimetic desire.

Pound's conception of the image can also be made to reveal its backwardness, its inscrutable desire, its apology for filth, by examining what it endeavors to exclude. Between 1911 and 1912, Pound's taste in poetry underwent a dramatic reversal. He disavowed most of his own early poetry, as well as the poets, such as Swinburne, who had inspired it. According to these revisions, Pound claimed that Victorian poetry was plagued by what he called "rhetoric": superficial ornament, incantational rhythms dissociated from meaning, imprecise use of words, and just plain

too many words. He attacked poets in whose work language or poetry "goes rotten, i.e., becomes slushy and inexact, or excessive and bloated."[7] Armed with this scatological rhetoric, Pound launched his vision of modern poetry. Out of this contempt, this anxiety about language, emerged the poetics of imagism. Out of the blurry, putrid, excessive body of language, emerged the image, with its hardness and clarity and precision: an icon rising from the excrement of language.

Pound's poetics should therefore be understood as an allegory of sublimation: the magical conversion of base matter into gold, excrement into imagery. By elevating the image, Pound fashioned an idol out of the contemptible material of language. Freud's theories of sublimation and anality teach us that through a process of negation and idealization, what is lowest becomes highest. Yet the ideal retains, in an altered state, all of the despicable qualities of its origins. Pound's image is essentially *anathematic:* its exalted or sacred character is a property of its power to shock and repel. The forbidden tongue of Swinburne is permitted to speak only through the perversely ideal form of the image. One might argue that the significance of imagism is that language itself is permitted to speak only through its other, the image.

Pound once remarked, "The image is the word beyond formulated language."[8] The idea that the image is a word that belongs to the pre-history or the after-life of language, a word excluded from language, brings to mind Adorno's notion that an image is "the plus of appearance," an apparition of something that does not exist.[9] More importantly, to speak of the image as excessive, as that which is cast out from language, a form of unknowing, necessarily invokes Bataille's economy of excess and his concept of heterogeneity. Bataille's scatological vision represents a crucial extremity, a kind of master trope, in the rhetoric of materiality. It also intersects with Pound's rhetoric of the image in some remarkable ways.

One of the rhetorical strategies Bataille uses in his earlier writings is to insert his theory of base materiality into a hierarchy of word and image, poetry and painting. As in the case of Pound, a particular contempt is reserved for certain dimensions of language and for poetry in particular. According to Bataille, poetry epitomizes all that is antithetical to his theory of heterogeneity: sentimentality, complacency, effeminacy, and "servile idealism." He speaks contemptuously of "poetic concoctions," "poetic haze," and "emasculated poetic complacency."[10] At times, Bataille's polemic sounds remarkably like the rhetoric of imagism: "the fact of needlessly resorting to literary or poetic verbiage, the inability to express oneself in a simple and categorical way, not only are the result of a vulgar impotence, but always betray a pretentious hypocrisy."[11]

In contrast to the poetic word, stands the figure of the image, which Bataille associates with revolution and the most uncompromising elements of his excremental vision. He states, "Whenever one has recourse to im-

ages, most often peremptory and provocative ones, borrowed from the most concrete contradictions, it is reality on the material order, human physiology, that comes into play."[12] More specifically, Bataille, like Pound, draws inspiration, and considerable rhetorical clout, from developments in the visual arts. In contemporary painting, Bataille discovers "the search for that which most ruptures elevation, and for a blinding brilliance"; further, he writes, "today, certain plastic representations are the expression of an intransigent materialism."[13] It is no coincidence that one of the sovereign figures in Bataille's discourse on materiality and expenditure is a painter who cuts off his ear.

During the 1930s, Bataille and Walter Benjamin were both living in Paris, and learned of each other's work through the group of writers and intellectuals known as the *College de Sociologie*. Their relation was close enough that, when Benjamin was forced to flee Paris in 1940, he left many of his papers with Bataille for safekeeping. A number of resonances (and possible traces of influence) can be detected between the work of the two men. The relation for example, between imagery and radical materiality that is only implicit in Bataille's work (or Pound's, for that matter), is stated explicitly in Benjamin's theory of allegory and the dialectical image. Beginning with his work on the *Trauerspiel* and allegory in the 1920s, the image is not only linked to various figures of materiality, but these figures are invariably associated with death: corpse, death mask, husk, ruin. Allegory, according to Benjamin, is characterized by a profusion of images, which are subject to a process he calls "mortification." The image empties itself under the gaze of the allegorist; it is revealed for what it is: a husk, a dead thing, a cipher, in which the allegorist "buries" meaning. The allegorical image is an object captured by death, but it is also a crypt. Knowledge, according to Benjamin, resides in what Barthes would later call "the empty sign," the image. Thus the allegorical image is described as the death mask of history and as a ruin.[14]

During the thirties, Benjamin adapted his theory of allegory to political discourse. From this encounter between Marxist theory and Baroque allegory, emerged Benjamin's concept of the "dialectical image" (a figure which bears extraordinary resemblance, formally, to Pound's ideogram). Benjamin wrote, "an image is that in which the past and the now flash into a constellation. In other words: image is dialectic at a standstill."[15] The dialectical image is identical to the historical object, to what Benjamin called "the trash of history"—the discarded products of culture which the critic "deciphers" in an allegorical fashion.[16] The dialectical image thus gathers in a single figure all of the notions that are central to the rhetoric of materiality: imagery, excrement, death. In a project akin to the aims of language poetry as a movement, Benjamin sought "to prove the materialistic view of history imagistic in a higher sense than the traditional"; that is, "to attain a heightened graphicness combined with a realization of the

Marxist method."[17] Benjamin knew that the true historical object was language itself; he wrote, "Only dialectical images are genuine (i.e., not archaic) images; and the place one encounters them is language."[18]

—DANIEL TIFFANY

NOTES

1 The idea that art is a medium of communication assumes that the language of poetry, for example, transports a more or less stable meaning between two point (such as a text and a reader). A medium is a bridge, but it is also a gap: between words and things, or between words and other words. A medium is also that which intervenes, ideologically, between poems and paintings, or poems and sonatas.

2 For an account of this trend in the visual arts, see Yves-Alain Bois, "Painting: The Task of Mourning" in *Endgame*. Boston Institute of Contemporary Art catalogue, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986).

3 On the concept and practice of cryptonymy, see Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Wolf Man's Magic Word. A Cryptonymy*, foreword by Jacques Derrida, trans. Nicholas Rand, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). For more on the work of Abraham (poet, translator, and psychoanalyst) see the special issue of *Diacritics* (#9, 1979) devoted to him.

4 Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), p.6.

5 Gilles Deleuze, *Dialogues*, trans. Claire Parnet, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), pp. 36-76.

6 Ezra Pound, *A Memoir of Gaudier-Brzeska*, (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 92.

7 Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays*, (New York: New Directions, 1954), p. 21.

8 Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska*, op. cit., p. 88.

9 T.W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. by C. Lenhardt, (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1984), pp. 116-147.

10 In particular, see Bataille's attack on Andre Breton and his article on Dali's painting, "The Lugubrious Game" in *Visions of Excess, Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, ed. by Allan Stoekl, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1985), pp. 24-53. It should also be noted that later in his career, Bataille gives a radically different estimation of poetry, associating it with loss and sacrifice. See his article, "The Notion of Expenditure" (p. 120).

11 Ibid., p. 92.

12 Ibid., p. 36.

13 Ibid., pp. 58, 51.

14 Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. by John Osborne, (London: NLB, 1977), pp. 166, 177-78, 182, 193, and *passim*.

[15] From Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, "Theoretics of Knowledge, Theory of Progress," trans. by Leigh Hafrey and Richard Sieburth, *The Philosophical Forum*, vol. 15, nos. 1-2, Fall-Winter 1983-84, p. 7. This section of the *Passagen-Werk* is absolutely essential reading for an insight into Benjamin's methodology.

[16] Ibid., pp. 5-6. For a recent work on Benjamin's project, see Michael W. Jennings, *Dialectical Images*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

[17] Ibid., pp. 8, 6.

[18] Ibid., p. 7.

SULFUR INDEX

Issues #1–21

Compiled by Martine Mickiewicz

Abrams, Richard H.:		
Considering Beckett's "Breath"	#6	47-49
Alcalay, Ammiel:		
After Ecclesiastes	#18	84-87
Alexander, Will:		
Australian X-Ray Painting	#2	57-58
Anderson, Martin:		
Giorgionesque; Seurat's "Port-en-Bessin, The Outer Harbour at Low Tide"	#7	61-62
Arendt, Erich:		
Jewish Cemetery in Prague (Translated by Suzanne Shipley Toliver)	#11	89-90
Armantrout, Rae:		
The Garden; Sense	#16	54-55
Arnold, A. James:		
Who is Aimé Césaire?, by Michel Leiris (Translation); *Poetry and Knowledge*, by Aimé Césaire (Translation)	#5	7-32
Selections from Suppôts et Suppliciations, by Antonin Artaud (Cotranslation)	#9	15-16
From Interjections, by Antonin Artaud (Cotranslation)	#9	38-59
Baudelaire's Flowers: Beauty, Evil and Kitsch	#13	138-148
Artaud, Antonin:		
Letter to Jean Paulhan (Translated by Norman Glass)	#2	191-196
Five Letters from Rodez (Translated by Norman Glass); *Letter to Peter Watson* (Translated by Clayton Eshleman, Bernard Bador and David Maclagan)	#7	68-99
Notebook extracts; *Selections from* Suppôts et Suppliciations (Translated by A. James Arnold and Clayton Eshleman); *From* Fragmentations (Translated by David Rattray); *From* Lettres (Translated by David Rattray); *From* Interjections (Translated by A. James Arnold and Clayton Eshleman)	#9	5-59
Ashbery, John:		
"How tall the buildings were as I began. . ."; White Collar Crime	#1	56-57
37 Haiku; So Many Lives	#5	100-103

Ashbery, John (continued):		
Haibun 1; Haibun 2; Haibun 3; Haibun 4; Haibun 5; Haibun 6	#9	113-117
Dreams of Adulthood; Forgotten Sex; Someone You Have Seen Before	#19	70-75
Ashton, Dore:		
Excerpts from an essay on Brian Nissen	#12	113-114
Ausländer, Rose:		
In Memorium Paul Celan (Translated by Carl Clifton Toliver)	#11	91
Auster, Paul:		
Letter to Michel Leiris, by Joan Miró (Translation)	#15	22-24
Avens, Roberts:		
Reflections on Wolfgang Giegerich's "Burial of the Soul in Technological Civilization"	#20	34-54
Bacon, Francis:		
Study for Portrait (Michel Leiris) (Painting)	#15	91
Portrait of Michel Leiris (Painting)	#15	cover
Bador, Bernard:		
Progress; The Call of the Caverns; Powerlessness; End of the Walk (All translated by Clayton Eshleman)	#3	20-25
Bread and Wine, by Robert Marteau (Cotranslation)	#7	40-43
Letter to Peter Watson, by Antonin Artaud (Cotranslation)	#7	91-99
From Sea Urchin Harakiri (Translated by Clayton Eshleman)	#10	63-67
Bakhtin, Mikhail:		
Last written words	#14	173
Balashova, Elena:		
Nasturtium as Reality, by Arkadii Dragomoshchenko (Cotranslation)	#19	94-107
Barcia, José Rubia:		
Thorns in the Snow; Risk Attraction; On Vacation Like a Stone; Anxiety of Signs, all by Juan Larrea (Cotranslations)	#16	121-123
Baron, Todd:		
a sphere for tristan tzara	#6	109-110
Bataille, Georges:		
Madame Edwarda (Translated by Daniel Tiffany)	#19	113-123
Beall, Sandra:		
In Einstein's House, In the Closet; Mother Goose; In Praise of Whatnot	#12	102-105
Beckett, Samuel:		
"Breath"	#6	46
Behrendt, Lynn:		
Rome, Assisi, Rome	#1	98-103
Benson, Steve:		
Assumptions Table (Coauthor)	#18	56-69
Bernstein, Charles:		
Dysraphism	#8	39-45

Bernstein, Charles (continued):

Vision, by David Marr (Review)	#8	197-198
Supplemental to "How to Nonread"	#9	214-215
The Academy in Peril: William Carlos Williams Meets the MLA	#10	154-158
Pounding Fascism	#13	98-103
The Harbor of Illusion; Foam Post; Safe Methods of Business	#13	117-125
Letter in response to Eliot Weinberger's Pound After Torrey and Other Futures	#13	162-163
McGann Agonist	#15	146-154
Fear of Flipping	#16	117-120
Blow-Me-Down Etude	#18	95-109
Reading, Summer 1987	#20	147-149

Berthot, Jake:

For Pro	#19	56

Bird, Jon:

From Nancy Spero: 1954-1986 (on the "Torture of Women" Series)	#19	32-34

Birkerts, Sven:

Report from the Besieged City, by Zbigniew Herbert (Translated by John and Bogdana Carpenter) (Review)	#15	154-160
The Collected Poems of Paul Blackburn, edited by Edith Jarolim (Review)	#16	139-148
Selected Poems by John Ashbery (Review)	#19	142-148
Left Out in the Rain: New Poems 1947-1985, by Gary Snyder (Review)	#19	174-176
Letter	#20	130-131

Bjorklund, Beth:

"PALE-VOICED, flayed. . ."; "CHALK-CROCUS, at. . ."; "STONE-BLOW behind the beetles. . .", all by Paul Celan (Translations)	#11	8-9

Blackburn, Paul:

The Term	#1	169
Statement; Marseille; Mediterráneo: a litoral; Gipsies in Malaga, 1956.; The Melody Lingers On; the parallel voyages; Keeping it Up; Mestiza; Discourse on Values; Alley Oop Speaks; To a Friend; "Birds chirp listlessly in the heat. . ."; "A grey day at Gangway 4. . ."; Close to Home: the intimations.; M/S; The Voices, It's Cheap; The Language Lesson; The Lonelies; Annuals; 0 miles; The Ghost; From the Parked Car	#4	64-96
Le Fou, by Robert Creeley (Review)	#7	183-189

Blau DuPlessis, Rachel:

Eclogue; Killing Me	#1	204-207
Ode	#3	15-19
Crowbar	#8	131-146
A Note on the State of H.D.'s The Gift	#9	178-182
Otherhow	#14	27-38
Draft #3: Of	#20	23-27

Blau DuPlessis, Rachel (continued):		
"Whowe": An Essay on Work by Susan Howe	#20	157-165
Sub Rrosa	#21	152-164
Blumenfeld, Erwin:		
Michel Leiris and the God Gou (Photograph)	#15	107
Bollobás, Enikö:		
A Personal Report on the Present Situation of the Hungarian Writer, Géza Szöcs	#21	93-95
Commentary on an Old Review, by Géza Szöcs (Cotranslation)	#21	96-100
Boone, Bruce:		
"Kennst Du Das Land?": Introduction to Jack Spicer's Letters to Allen Joyce	#10	136-139
Braman, Sandra:		
Recess	#4	57-59
Bronk, William:		
The Person of Fiction, the Fiction of Person (Review)	#5	168-172
Brown, Norman O.:		
Cleveland State University Poetry Center Jubilation of Poets Panel, "Homage to Robert Duncan," October 23, 1986	#19	11-23
Buchwald, Howard:		
Untitled (Painting); Untitled (Drawing); Untitled (Drawing)	#13	95-97
Bunting, Basil:		
A Song for Rustam; An Open Letter to Louis Zukofsky (1932)	#14	7-10
Burns, Gerald:		
From A Book of Spells (lines 661-724)	#3	37-39
How to Nonread; To Charles Bernstein	#9	211-216
From A Book of Spells	#10	36-38
Northern Summer: New & Selected Poems 1963-1983, by John Matthias (Review)	#19	161-163
The Boat of Quiet Hours, by Jane Kenyon (Review)	#19	173-174
Clarke on the Fo'c'sle; To Him, Burns	#20	145-147
The Myth of Accidence, Book VII	#21	114-117
Burnside, Madeleine:		
Three Pieces	#6	64-67
Butterick, George:		
Fame & Love in New York, by Ed Sanders (Review)	#2	231-232
Pre-Faces *& Other Writings and* "Vienna Blood" *and other poems,* by Jerome Rothenberg (Review)	#4	150-156
Five Aces and Independence, by John Thorpe (Review)	#7	172-174
Four Lectures, by Stephen Rodefer (Review)	#8	198-202
Editing Postmodern Texts; From The Collected Poems of Charles Olson: 1940-49 (ed)	#11	113-157
From The Collected Poems of Charles Olson: 1950-57 (ed)	#12	75-95

Butterick, George (continued):
Herself Defined: The Poet H.D. and Her World, by Barbara Guest (Review) #12 144-147
From The Collected Poems of Charles Olson: 1958-64 (ed) #13 4-20
Paradise, by Ron Silliman (Review) #17 154-159
From Repartée with the Mummy; *Repeatedly* #19 78-81

Byrd, Don:
Alter Sublime, by Christopher Dewdney (Review) #2 248-251
Tuumba #31-#41 (Review) #8 190-195
Learned Ignorance and Other Defenses #11 168-177
Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living, by Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela; *American Poetry and Culture, 1945-1980*, by Robert von Hallberg (Reviews) #16 171-176
Letter to Jed Rasula #17 110-115
Language Poetry, 1971-1986 #20 149-157
Bernstein's "The Sophist" #21 194-196

Cameron, Esther:
Argumentum E Silentio; Les Globes; "NO HAND holds me either. . ."; "WHITE, white, white. . ."; Frankfurt, September; "THE SCOOPED-OUT HEART. . ."; "THE INDUSTRIOUS. . ." all by Paul Celan (Translations) #11 9-15
The Distant Earth: Celan's Planetary Vision #11 61-70

Campbell, Bruce:
Name, by Alan Davies (Review) #21 190-191
"Syncopation Against the Borderline": Charles Bernstein's "The Sophist" #21 193-194

Caponegro, Mary:
Three pieces from Microfictions #1 192

Carruth, Hayden:
Who I Am No. 1 #1 64-69
Who I Am No. 2 #2 180-187
Who I Am No. 3 #3 101-106
Selected & New Poems, by Jim Harrison (Review) #7 157-160
Answers for William Corbett #10 178-179
Meditation in the Presence of "Ostrich Walk"; The Avenue Lined with American Chestnut Trees is More Than a Textbook; Prolegomenon to a Fantasized Propaedeutics for Kathleen Roberts; Not By Any Means Have I Now for the First Time #13 48-50

Celan, Paul:
"PALE-VOICED, flayed. . ." (Translated by Beth Bjorklund); *"CHALK-CROCUS, at. . ."* (Translated by Beth Bjorklund); *"STONE-BLOW behind the beetles. . ."* (Translated by Beth Bjorklund); *Argumentum E Silentio* (Translated by Esther Cameron); *Les Globes* (Translated by Esther Cameron); *"NO HAND holds me either. . ."* (Translated by

Celan, Paul (continued):
Esther Cameron); *"WHITE, white, white. . ."* (Translated by Esther Cameron); *Frankfurt, September* (Translated by Esther Cameron); *"THE SCOOPED-OUT HEART. . ."* (Translated by Esther Cameron); *"THE INDUSTRIOUS. . ."* (Translated by Esther Cameron); *"BLUE OF THE LODES in your mouth. . ."* (Translated by Katharine Washburn); *"ONCE, when death was mobbed. . ."* (Translated by Katharine Washburn); *"GONE INTO THE NIGHT, complicit. . ."* (Translated by Katharine Washburn); *The Second Cycle of Zeitgehöft* (Translated by Pierre Joris); *Three Letters* (Translated and edited by Jerry Glenn) #11 8-31

Celan-Lestrange, Giséle:
Le gris ét la côte; Hommage á Erich Arendt; Terre ébranlée; Chemins de mémoire (Drawings) #3 52-55

Engraving from Gravure de Schwarrmant (1969); Engraving from Gravure de Atemkristall (1965); Engraving from Gravure de Schwarrmant (1969) #11 97-99

Césaire, Aimé:
Batouque (Translated by Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith) #1 212-218

Poetry and Knowledge (Translated by A. James Arnold) #5 17-32

Visitation; Debris; Tom-Tom II; The Oubliettes of the Sea and the Deluge; Tangible Disaster; Redemption; Your Hair; Noon Knives; Lost Body; . . .But There is this Hurt; Corpse of a Frenzy; I Perseus Centuplicating Myself; Tomb of Paul Eluard (all translated by Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith) #5 33-49

Chamberlain, Lori:
"One Night Stand" *and Other Poems,* by Jack Spicer (Edited by Donald Allen) (Review) #6 165-168

Defenestration of Prague, by Susan Howe (Review) #9 201-205

Cheek, Chris:
Assumptions Table (Coauthor) #18 56-69

Chernicoff, Billie:
Corona #1 208-211

Christensen, Paul:
Introduction: Part I The Early Years (1936-1948) The Letters of Edward Dahlberg and Charles Olson #1 104-120

Introduction: Part II An Unravelling Friendship (1949-1950) The Letters of Edward Dahlberg and Charles Olson #2 65-71

Introduction: Part III The Final Feud (1950-1955) The Letters of Edward Dahlberg and Charles Olson #3 122-126

Cap of Darkness; The Magician's Feastletters, by Diane Wakoski (Reviews) #7 175-180

The Nap #10 88-101

Break-down; Desire #14 85-87

Internal Resistances: The Poetry of Edward Dorn, edited by Donald Wesling (Review) #14 150-155

The Roundhouse Voices: Selected and New Poems, by Dave Smith (Review) #15 175-177

Christensen, Paul (continued):		
The Achievement of George Butterick	#21	4-16
Clifford, James:		
Some Experiments in Ethnographic Polyphony	#8	168-172
Allegories of the Gaze, by Victor Segalen (Translation Excerpts)	#9	182-186
Notes on excerpts from Headhunters about Themselves: An Ethnographic Report from Irian Jaya, Indonesia, by J.H.M.C. Boelaars	#10	164
Oneirography: A Small Collection	#11	194-200
The Jardin des Plantes (Postcards)	#12	153-156
Chronotopes: Notes for a (Temporary) Exhibition on "Affinities of the Tribal and the Postmodern"	#13	148-152
The Tropological Realism of Michel Leiris	#15	4-20
The Unbridled Line (André Masson), by Michel Leiris (Translation)	#15	25-26
Phantom Africa (Sanga); Words/Swerves; Alberto Giacometti; Phantom Africa (Emawayish); Mirror of the Bullfight, all by Michel Leiris (Translations)	#15	30-47
The Naked Sword, by Edmond Jabès (Translation)	#15	86-88
The Caribbean Turn	#15	104-105
Creolization, by Edouard Glissant (Translation)	#15	105-106
Authenticity; In the Musee de L'Homme; Lasso; Acted Theatre and Lived Theatre in the Zar Cult; Envoi, all by Michel Leiris (Translations)	#15	109-125
Mauss's Memory	#17	145-153
Snow	#21	187-189
Codrescu, Andrei:		
The Other End	#16	10-25
Cole, Norma:		
Paper House Part One (a-o)	#17	50-55
Paper House Part Two (p-x)	#19	82-85
Connor, Linda:		
Hands (Photograph); Untitled (Canada Photograph); Untitled (Arizona Photograph); Untitled (New Mexico Photograph); Petroglyphs (Photograph); Untitled (Utah Photograph)	#12	42-47
Coolidge, Clark:		
Peru Eye, The Heart of the Lamp	#6	39-45
From The Book of During (Part I)	#14	11-21
L.A. In Time	#14	158-159
From The Book of During (Part II)	#16	91-102
From The Book of During (Part III)	#17	43-49
Rova Notes	#17	129-134
Listener's Reach	#18	163-178
Response to Birkerts	#19	150-153
Section III from "At Egypt"	#21	144-151

Corbett, William:
Washington's Birthday #6 90-92

Questions for Hayden Carruth #8 163

East Mauch—Jim Thorpe #16 38-47

A Glimpse of Pro #19 55-56

Corman, Cid:
Poems, by Paul Celan (Translated by Michael Hamburger) (Review) #3 224-231

Corrin, Nicholas and Lisa:
On Antonio López García #18 94

Cote, Alan:
Scent in the Air; Walking in the Dark; Six Views of a Mountain (Drawings) #15 143-145

Crane, Hart:
Hart Crane to Kenneth Burke: Ten Unpublished Letters, edited by R.Y. Zachary #2 201-213

Cruz, San Juan de la:
The Fountain (Translated by Eliot Weinberger) #3 87-91

Csoóri, Sándor:
The Visitor's Memories (Translated by Gyula Kodolányi and Clayton Eshleman); *Writer—Nation—State* (Translated by László Hámos); *The Feeling of Infinity* (Translated by Gyula Kodolányi and Clayton Eshleman) #21 77-84

Czechowski, Heinz:
Oradea (Translated by Suzanne Shipley Toliver) #11 92-94

Dahlberg, Edward:
The Letters of Edward Dahlberg and Charles Olson: The Early Years (1936-1948), edited by Paul Christensen #1 120-168

The Letters of Edward Dahlberg and Charles Olson: An Unravelling Friendship (1949-1950), edited by Paul Christensen #2 71-166

The Letters of Edward Dahlberg and Charles Olson: The Final Feud (1950-1955), edited by Paul Christensen #3 126-223

Davidson, Michael:
Charles Olson & Robert Creeley: The Complete Correspondence, edited by George Butterick (Review) #1 226-229

The Landing of Rochambeau #2 197-200

The Words are Trapped in Doxa; You are not Great You are Life; Watermark #4 117-125

Broken Off by the Music, by John Yau (Review) #8 175-178

The Maximus Poems, by Charles Olson, edited by George Butterick (Review) #9 188-194

A Felt Architectonics of the Numinous: Robert Duncan's Ground Work (Review) #12 133-139

The Endurance of Resolve #13 111-113

Davidson, Michael (continued):
"Writing the Old-Fashioned Way": On Bob Perelman's The First World (Review) #19 134-142

Davis, Lydia:
The Mouse #6 105-108

Joan Miró; Glossary: My Glosses' Ossuary; Metaphor; Mouth Water; Fault, all by Michel Leiris (Translations) #15 24-48

In the Proximity of Great Men #15 49-50

From Biffures (Crossouts); *A Life in Blurbs (la Regle du Jeu); Civilization (1929); Fred Astaire; Stones for a Possible Alberto Giacometti,* all by Michel Leiris (Translations) #15 69-124

De Angeli, Milo:
With Broken Oars They Embark; Stones in the Warm Mud; Telegram; Born on the Earth; The Killing (all translated by Lawrence Venuti) #18 152-155

Starting Over: An Autobiographical Note; The Absentees (both translated by Lawrence Venuti) #18 155-157

Dee, D. James:
Porfirio DiDonna in His Studio; His studio (Photographs) #19 50-51

Deguy, Michel:
"I call muse *the seesaw of the sky. . .*"; *To Forget the Image* (all translated by Clayton Eshleman) #3 65-70

Etc (Translated by Clayton Eshleman) #8 109-113

Dewdney, Christopher:
Points in Time; This My Emissary #9 118-119

Municipal Hormone Loops #20 168-169

DiDonna, Porfirio:
Untitled (1981 Drawing); Untitled (1981 Drawing); Untitled (1979 Drawing); Untitled (1979 Drawing) #11 106-109

Crucifixion (Painting); Untitled (1975 Mixed Media); Untitled (1976 Mixed Media); Untitled (1980 Mixed Media); Untitled (1983 Mixed Media); Untitled (1984 Mixed Media) #19 64-69

Untitled (1975 Painting) #19 cover

Dona, Lydia:
Untitled (1985 Drawing); Untitled (1985 Drawing); Untitled (1986 Drawing); Untitled (1986 Drawing) #21 103-106

Dor, Milo:
Paul Celan (Translated by Joachim Herrmann and Rebecca S. Rodgers) #11 32-35

Dragomoshchenko, Arkadii:
Accidia; Obscure Bases of Narration; A Sentimental Elegy; Study of Dimension; "I dread my dreams. . ." (all translated by Lyn Hejinian and Michael Molnar) #14 116-131

Nasturium as Reality (Translated by Elena Balashova and Lyn Hejinian) #19 94-107

Drake, Barbara:
The Bed #13 126-128

Duncan, Robert:
In Blood's Domaine (Passages) #3 4-5

Economou, George:
AMEPIKH (IV and V) #5 109-112

At the Western Gates and *The Desert Mothers*, by Nathaniel Tarn (Reviews) #14 167-173

Eigner, Larry:
"a late hour. . ."; "Fire Dept. . . ."; "car stuck. . ."; "hours by the window. . ." #3 71-74

"e n d H i s t o r y a b o u t l i k e. . ."; "absence of the dead tree. . ."; "down the block. . ."; "breathing invisible smoke. . ."; "the most productive agricultural country in the East. . ." #14 42-44

Letter to Clayton Eshleman #14 140-143

Ellenwood, Ray:
Apolnixède Entre le Ciel et la Terre/Apolnixède Between Heaven and Earth by Claude Gauvreau (Translation) #6 95-100

Emerson, Cornelia:
Midnight Mass, by Paul Bowles (Review) #3 236-237

Mrs. Bridge & Mr. Bridge, by Evan S. Connell (Review) #5 155-156

Enslin, Theodore:
Axes 26 #2 30-38

Axes 72 #8 66-72

Enzensberger, Hans Magnus:
Report from Bonn; Memorial; She's Thirty-Three; The White Collar Worker; The Divorce; Short History of the Bourgeoisie (all translated by Herbert Graf) #9 124-129

Eric, James:
Working with Cassavetes #7 103-104

Eshleman, Clayton:
The Loaded Sleeve of Hades #1 182-185

Batouque, by Aimé Césaire (Cotranslation) #1 212-218

Seeds of Narrative in Paleolithic Art #2 39-52

Progress; The Call of the Caverns; Powerlessness; End of the Walk, all by Bernard Bador (Translations) #3 20-25

"I call muse *the seesaw of the sky. . ."; To Forget the Image*, both by Michel Deguy (Translations) #3 65-70

Visitation; Debris; Tom-Tom II; The Oubliettes of the Sea and the Deluge; Tangible Disaster; Redemption; Your Hair; Noon Knives; Lost Body; . . .But There is This Hurt; Corpse of a Frenzy; I Perseus Centuplicating Myself; Tomb of Paul Eluard, all by Aimé Césaire (Cotranslations) #5 33-49

Terrestrial #5 73-76

Bread and Wine, by Robert Marteau (Cotranslation) #7 40-43

Eshleman, Clayton (continued):

The Color Rake of Time; Elegy; Manticore Vortex; Certification	#7	52-60
Letter to Peter Watson, by Antonin Artaud (Cotranslation)	#7	91-99
A Note on "Three Plays of Love and Hate"	#7	101-102
Etc, by Michel Deguy (Translation)	#8	109-113
The Life of John Berryman, by John Haffenden; *Elizabeth Bishop: The Complete Poems. 1927-1979* (Reviews)	#8	178-184
Letter to the American Poetry Review	#8	186-189
Selections from Suppôts et Suppliciations, by Antonin Artaud (Cotranslation)	#9	15-16
From Interjections, by Antonin Artaud (Cotranslation)	#9	38-59
A Note on Bernard Bador's Poetry	#10	60-62
From Sea Urchin Harakiri, by Bernard Bador (Translation)	#10	63-67
A Note on Paul Celan	#11	85-88
Untitled	#11	110-112
From A Night with Hamlet, by Vladimír Holan (Cotranslation)	#12	4-11
Tuxedoed Groom on Canvas Bride	#13	21-27
From A Night with Hamlet, by Vladimír Holan (Cotranslation)	#13	129-134
Response to Mary Kinzie	#13	153-157
A Seifert Translation	#13	169-172
From A Night with Hamlet, by Vladimír Holan (Cotranslation)	#14	74-80
The Excavation of Artaud	#14	105
The Meaning of the Indigenous in Vallejo	#15	164-168
Part One of a Discussion on Psychology and Poetry (Coauthor)	#16	56-74
Thorns in the Snow; Risk Attraction; On Vacation Like a Stone; Anxiety of Signs, all by Juan Larrea (Cotranslations)	#16	121-123
From A Night with Hamlet, by Vladimír Holan (Cotranslation)	#16	130-137
The Bill	#17	56-61
Toledan Self-Portrait, by Julio Ortega (Translation)	#19	46-49
"Not one of Rilke's 'early departed'—Vera. . ."	#19	52-53
Brown Thrasher; Children of the Monosyllable	#19	108-112
Note on Sulfur *Move*	#19	124-125
The Roses of Kádár	#21	44-51
Anxiously Autumn Arrives; The Angel of Dread; Seventh Eclogue; Root; Serbian Postcard 1; Forced March, all by Miklós Radnóti (Cotranslations)	#21	56-62
Ode to the Elegy, by Miklós Mészöly (Cotranslation)	#21	63-65
The Biography of a Woman, by Ferenc Juhász (Cotranslation)	#21	66-76
The Visitor's Memories, by Sándor Csoóri (Cotranslation)	#21	77-78
The Feeling of Infinity, by Sándor Csoóri (Cotranslation)	#21	82-84

Eshleman, Clayton (continued):
The Sea and John Smith; Tract on Rhyme, both by Gyula Kodolányi (Cotranslations) #21 85-92

Commentary on an Old Review, by Géza Szöcs (Cotranslation) #21 96-100

Essick, Robert N.:
The Eidophusikon (Review) #2 242-243

Evans, George:
The Renaissance Drunk; The Dresser; Working for the Iceman; Islands #10 84-87

A View from Space #14 81-84

Everson, William:
Danse Macabre; Reaper #8 4-7

Exner, Richard:
Paul Celan's Atemwende: *About the "Death of Speech" and the "Hope of Silence"* (Translated by Suzanne Shipley Toliver) #11 71-81

Felstiner, John:
Paul Celan's Triple Exile #11 47-52

Ferdman, Sandra:
From the Notebooks (1929-1937), by César Vallejo (Translation) #18 4-16

Fieger, Hank:
Rowlands and McGuire in a scene from *The Third Day Comes* (Photograph) #7 107

Fisher, Allen:
The artist's third monologue #3 9-14

Bel Air #12 50-57

Assumptions Table (Coauthor) #18 56-69

Fisher, Sandra:
Joey Reading Baudelaire in Paris; Hiroyuki in Paris (Paintings) #9 111-112

Fitterman, Robert:
Stalled Bus to Venice; The Home; The Garden Cafeteria; The Shelter #10 110-114

Franzen, Cola:
I Myself; "They force me to play. . ."; Sentence; Edifice Dedicated to Silence, all by Saul Yurkievich (Translations) #14 106-109

Fraser, Russell:
The Noise of Time: The Prose of Osip Mandelstam, edited and translated by Clarence Brown (Review) #20 183-194

Friedlander, Benjamin:
Letter in response to Eliot Weinberger's Pound After Torrey and Other Futures #13 163-165

Frumkin, Gene:
For Those Who Dream of Love; Reject from a Marxist Anthology; The Renaturing Cycle; Arbitrary Design; 'Something'; Script #6 82-89

The Brown Dog #20 110

Galan, Frantisek:
From A Night with Hamlet, by Vladimír Holan (Cotranslation) #12 4-11
From A Night with Hamlet, by Vladimír Holan (Cotranslation) #13 129-134
From A Night with Hamlet, by Vladimír Holan (Cotranslation) #14 74-80
From A Night with Hamlet, by Vladimír Holan (Cotranslation) #16 130-137

Gans, Eric:
Salamander: Selected Poems of Robert Marteau (Translated by Anne Winters); *Traité du blanc et des teintures/Treatise on White and Tincture*, by Robert Marteau (Translated by Barry Callaghan) (Reviews) #2 244-247

García, Antonio López:
Washbasin and Mirror (Painting); Remainders from a Meal (Drawing); Maria (Drawing); Window at Night (Painting); The House of Antonio Lopez Torres (Drawing); Gran Via (Painting) #18 88-93
Skinned Rabbit (Painting) #18 cover

Gauer, James:
It Just So Happens; No One Feels Like I Do #16 33-34

Gauffre, Christian:
Leiris in his Paris Apartment (Photograph) #15 117

Gauvreau, Claude:
From Entrails; *Apolnixède Entre le Ciel et la Terre/ Apolnixède Between Heaven and Earth* (Translated by Ray Ellenwood); *Fatigue et Réalité sans Soupçon/Trustful Fatigue and Reality; L'Ombre sur le Cerceau/The Shadow on the Hoop* #6 93-104

Giacometti, Alberto:
Portrait de Michel Leiris III (Drawing) #15 89

Gibson-Feller, Arlena:
From The Hipster: *The Story of Harry "The Hipster" Gibson* #17 10-16

Giegerich, Wolfgang:
Deliverance from the Stream of Events: Okeanos and the Circulation of the Blood #21 118-140

Ginsberg, Allen:
Reading Bai Juyi; Black Shroud; Things I Don't Know #17 17-25

Glancy, Diane:
Some Thoughts on Our Uncommon Language #14 39-41
Peru, Kansas; July 14; Mother GOodbye #18 70-73

Glass, Norman:
Letter to Jean Paulhan, by Antonin Artaud (Translation) #2 191-196
Five Letters from Rodez, by Antonin Artaud (Translation) #7 68-90

Gleason, Judith:
From Oya, in Praise of the Goddess #12 62-74

Glenn, Jerry:
Instead of an Introduction on Paul Celan #11 5-7
Three Letters, by Paul Celan (Translated and edited) #11 27-31

Glissant, Edouard:
Creolization (Translated by James Clifford) #15 105-106

Glück, Robert:
HTLV-3 #17 33-36

Golub, Leon:
"Riot II"; Details of "Riot II" (Paintings) #10 77-79

"What is the meaning of a symbolically perfect and a physically faultless perfect art?. . ."; Gigantomachies; Corporate Power and Free Will #17 62-68

Gordon, Richard:
Untitled (1978 Photograph) #2 169

Graf, Herbert:
Report from Bonn; Memorial; She's Thirty-Three; The White Collar Worker; The Divorce; Short History of the Bourgeoisie, all by Hans Magnus Enzensberger (Translations) #9 124-129

Greene, Jonathan:
Back; Concert; History of the Great Poem #4 50-53

Greene, Stephen:
"I recall a quiet, intensely involved young Porfirio. . ." #19 57-59

Greenlandic Folktales:
The Fox-Wife and the Penis of the Lake; Ukuamâq (both translated by Lawrence Millman) #13 59-62

Imarasugssuaq; Meqqoq; Avigiatsiak (all translated by Lawrence Millman) #16 114-116

Grenier, Robert:
Tongues of Angel Make/For Union with the Make—What to do with a book/for Parts of a Wedding #20 165-166

Gunn, Thom:
Tenderloin; The Honesty; In Time of Plague #13 44-47

Haggerty, Michael:
Jazz (Interview with Michel Leiris) (Translation) #15 97-104

Hamilton, Donald:
On Paul Celan, by Hans Richter (Cotranslation) #11 44-46

Hámos, László:
Writer—Nation—State, Sándor Csoóri (Translation) #21 78-81

Hartley, George:
Barrett Watten on Poetry and Politics (Interview) #21 196-207

Hausmann, Raoul:
Present Inter Noumenal (Coauthor); *Cauchemar; Three Little Pine Trees* #6 50-58

Heidsieck, Bernard:
Le Carrefour de la Chaussée d'Antin #6 113-127

Heise, Hans-Jürgen:
Paul Celan (Translated by Jeff Worley and Linda Krause Worley) #11 36-43

Paul Celan (Translated by Carl Clifton Toliver) #11 94

Hejinian, Lyn:
The Twill #1 74-77

"The inanimate are rocks, desks, bubble. . ."; "Rain on the macadam quaver ticks. . ."; "Under the radio roof, a mere wisp. . ."; "The blue-green northeast lake props its aureole. . ."; "It rained all afternoon. Plots abut. . ."; "Mental watchdog, the brainstorm's over. . ."; "The lighter the sky the less depth is apparent. . ."; "The tidal throughway from a distance. . ."; "pandemonium hews. . ." #5 117-123

My Life (Reviewed by Diane Wakoski) #8 205-208

From The Guard #9 130-135

Accidia; Obscure Bases of Narration; A Sentimental Elegy; Study of Dimension; "I dread my dreams. . .", all by Arkadii Dragomoshchenko (Cotranslations) #14 116-131

From The Person #16 79-85

Nasturtium as Reality, by Arkadii Dragomoshchenko (Cotranslation) #19 94-107

Helsem, Michael:
To the editor #20 129

Herrmann, Joachim:
Paul Celan, by Milo Dor (Cotranslation) #11 32-35

Celan, by Götz Wienold (Cotranslation) #11 53-60

Hickman, Leland:
Annotation For That Which Follows; He Who Delights in Signs #12 12-16

Hill, R. Nemo:
Self-Portrait; Children's Story; The Top of the Tongue #16 35-37

Hillman, James:
Alchemical Blue and the Unio Mentalis #1 33-50

Part One of a Discussion on Psychology and Poetry (Coauthor) #16 56-74

Holan, Vladimír:
From A Night with Hamlet (Translated by Clayton Eshleman and Frantisek Galan) #12 4-11

From A Night with Hamlet (Translated by Clayton Eshleman and Frantisek Galan) #13 129-134

From A Night with Hamlet (Translated by Clayton Eshleman and Frantisek Galan) #14 74-80

From A Night with Hamlet (Translated by Clayton Eshleman and Frantisek Galan) #16 130-137

Hölderlin, Friedrich:
Summer (Translated by David Rattray) #6 111

Hollander, Benjamin:
Resistance, by Charles Bernstein (Review) #12 139-143

Roman Jakobson/Verbal Art, Verbal Sign, Verbal Time (Edited by Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy) (Review) #15 177-184

Commentary of the False Numbers – 3, 4 #18 81-83

Paul Celan: Last Poems (Translated by Katharine Washburn and Margaret Guillemin) (Review) #19 177-182

Hollander, Benjamin (continued):
A Labor of "Song's Exaction" Dreaming Close By, by Rick London (Review) #21 164-168

Hoover, Paul:
The Chinese Notebook #6 24-28

Horan, Elizabeth:
Gabriela Mistral #19 167-168

Howe, Susan:
Pythagorean Silence #3 57-64

"Brute affirmation. . ."; "Corruptible first figure. . ."; "Double penetrable foreign sequel. . ."; "Light inaccessible as darkness. . .";
"Offering or gesture of offering. . ."; "Bound Cupid sea washed. . ." #9 88-94

Howell, Stokes:
Mother #7 9-19

Hyde, Jaqueline:
Extracts from Antonin Artaud's notebooks (Photographs) #9 5-14

Indiana, Gary:
Igorot Man (Photograph) #9 107

Excerpts from Imitation of Life #19 86

Irby, James E.:
Joyful Night; Fabulous Censures; The Adhering Substance; Fifes, Epifany, Goats; Weight of Flavor; Death of Time; Procession; Tangencies; Ecstasy of the Destroyed Substances; Resistance, all by José Lezama Lima (Translations) #3 40-51

Jabès, Edmond:
The Book Belongs to the Reader (Translated by Rosmarie Waldrop) #8 73-78

Well Water; Groundless; The Pact of Spring (Translated by Keith Waldrop) #8 79-85

The Naked Sword (Translated by James Clifford) #15 86-88

Jachna, Joe:
Rte. 41, Wisconsin (Photograph) #2 171

Jackson, Laura (Riding):
Letter #8 211-212

Engaging in the Impossible #10 4-35

Letter #14 148-150

Introduction to a Book of Later-Life Commentaries #20 86-109

Jaffe, Nora:
Sunshine's Ear #3; Sunshine's Ear #4; Horizontal Spinework; Exposed Root System (Drawings) #4 46-49

Mt. St. Helens #1; Mt. St. Helens #3; Threnody for Sunshine #3; Threnody for Sunshine #7 (Drawings) #5 50-53

Jakobson, Roman:
Roman Jakobson (Interviewed by David Shapiro) #12 165-171

Janicot, Françoise:
Station de Metro/Chausée D'Antin (Photograph) #3 100

Bernard Heidsieck (Photograph) #6 112

Jarolim, Edith:
Introduction to Twenty-Two Poems, by Paul Blackburn #4 60-64

Note on Blackburn Review of Le Fou, by Robert Creeley #7 183-185

Response to Sven Birkerts' review of The Collected Poems of Paul Blackburn #17 134-135

Jennett, Matthew:
Editor's Note to Ezra Pound's Unpublished Draft of Canto LXXXIV #1 5-6

Johnson, Honor:
You Place #14 110-111

Johnson, Ronald:
Ark 35, Spire called Arm of the Moon #2 27-29

Ark 39, The Roswell Spire #6 68-72

Ark 47, Plow Spire #10 124-131

Ark 54, Starspire #17 26-28

Joris, Pierre:
The Broken Glass #2 53-56

Selected Poems of Rainer Maria Rilke, A Translation from the German and Commentary by Robert Bly (Review) #4 159-162

German Landscape Revisited #9 95

The Second Cycle of Zeitgehöft, by Paul Celan (Translation) #11 17-26

From "Winnetou Old" #19 35-39

Juhász, Ferenc:
The Biography of a Woman (Cotranslated by Gyula Kodolányi and Clayton Eshleman) #21 66-76

Kallet, Marilyn:
". . .the pregnancy has created in me. . ." #13 173

Kaplan, Ed:
A Confusion of People Inside #4 36-38

Karlins, Mark:
Snow White; Perry; "the farmyard is infested with rivers. . ." #3 113-115

"At Matlock cave. . ."; The Village; Thread; Pianist in Search of a Blue Note; "In the center of the labyrinth. . ." #12 17-21

"In the dream of the glass cliff. . ."; "Dear Comrade. . ."; "Like oracles. . ."; Greybeard in Ring; Sam Spade Exceeds Us Humanly; Narrative; Naming the Animals; Mastery is the Power to Stop Writing (Blanchot) #16 4-9

Kelly, Robert:
Postcards from the Underworld #1 78-95

Kessler, Michael:
Escaped; Nap; Strained; Prayer; Earth Strike (Drawings) #14 89-93

Khlebnikov, Velimir:
"Wind whose. . ."; "Bow! Wow! Bow! . . ."; "P pay o P —. . ."; "Crawling crying craven. . ."; "The law of the see-saw argues. . ."; Bakunin Baking in Baku (Excerpt); *"LAFFERS LOVE LAFFING. . ."; "People say a poem must be understandable. . ."* (all translated by Paul Schmidt) #7 115-120

Kienhuis, Ronald:
Photograph of Choreography/Costume from the dance "After Words" by Alice Farley #6 cover

Killian, Sean:
Nexus; As Signatures Sag (Invocation to Kali); Trigger Finger (On Translation); Missive #18 158-162

Kitaj, R.B.:
Yona in Paris; Arikha in Paris; Ted in Paris; Duncan in Paris; Tim in Paris; Sandra in Paris (Drawings) #9 96-101

Kitaj in Paris (Drawing) #9 cover

Klein, Norman:
le Géant (Review) #5 150-151

The Bibliophile Jacob and the Spanish Forger (Review) #6 179-180

Unearthing the Vampire #10 185-189

Klein, Yves:
The Leap (Photograph) #12 22

Kleinzahler, August:
Relaxing in California; The Interior Decorator on Sunday; Dejection Between Foot and Brow; Song; 86 #3 116-121

Cautionary Lines for a Thriftless Lady; Real Hair; The Tunnel of Love; A February Idyll; Vancouver; An Autumnal Sketch #7 146-150

The Well-Tempered Sentence: A Punctuation Handbook for the Innocent, the Eager, and the Doomed, by Karen Elizabeth Gordon (Review) #8 172-174

The Collected Prose of Carl Rakosi (Review) #11 192-194

By the Tagus; Evening, in A Minor; Workout, With Nib; Ye Olden Barge; Poppies in the Wind #13 82-85

Basil Bunting #14 4-6

Love Poem; The Tree #20 28-29

Kodolányi, Gyula:
Notes on Contributors #21 51-55

Anxiously Autumn Arrives; The Angel of Dread; Seventh Eclogue; Root; Serbian Postcard 1; Forced March, all by Miklós Radnóti (Co-translations) #21 56-62

Ode to the Elegy, Miklós Mészöly (Cotranslation) #21 63-65

The Biography of a Woman, by Ferenc Juhász (Cotranslation) #21 66-76

Kodolányi, Gyula (continued):
The Visitor's Memories, by Sándor Csoóri (Cotranslation) #21 77-78

The Feeling of Infinity, by Sándor Csoóri (Cotranslation) #21 82-84

The Sea and John Smith; Tract on Rhyme (Translated by Gyula Kodolányi and Clayton Eshleman) #21 85-92

Konyalian-Grenier, Arpine:
Atonement; Getting Up; Rope Song; The Covenant; When Angelika Leaves #8 46-54

Koslow, Francine A.:
Excerpts about the Stam Twins from *The Print Collector's Newsletter* #19 86-87

Kotter, Jennifer:
Jerome Rothenberg (Photograph) #6 32

Laffoley, Paul:
"Concerning I, Robur Master of the World. . ."; *Divine Comedy Illustration Description; From* The Dantesphere: *A Proposal for the Illustration of* The Divine Comedy *of Dante Alighieri as an Artificial Solar Satellite* #17 69-74

L'Inferno Overall (Illustration); Satan (Detail); Wood of Suicides (Detail); II Purgatorio Overall (Illustration); The Island of the Mountain of Purgatory (Detail); The Earthly Paradise (Detail); II Paradiso Overall (Illustration); II Paradiso Center (Detail); The Celestial Rose (Detail) #17 75-83

I, Robur Master of the World (Painting) #17 cover

Lamantia, Philip:
Unachieved #20 30-33

Lansing, Gerrit:
Olana #1 186-191

3 Poems of the Underworld(s) #6 128-129

Scratching from Startles, Finished Fine #20 167-168

Larrea, Juan:
Thorns in the Snow; Risk Attraction; On Vacation Like a Stone; Anxiety of Signs (all translated by José Rubia Barcia and Clayton Eshleman) #16 121-123

Lazorik, Wayne R.:
Untitled (1979 Photograph) #2 170

Leiris, Michel:
Who is Aimé Césaire? (Translated by A. James Arnold) #5 7-16

Joan Miró (Translated by Lydia Davis); *The Unbridled Line (André Masson)* (Translated by James Clifford); *Glossary: My Glosses' Ossuary* (Translated by Lydia Davis) #15 24-27

Pages from Leiris's Glossary #15 28-29

Metaphor (Translated by Lydia Davis); *Phantom Africa (Sanga)* (Translated by James Clifford); *Words/Swerves* (Translated by James Clifford); *Alberto Giacometti* (Translated by James Clifford) #15 30-40

Leiris, Michel (continued):
"My life as I see it" (Drawing) #15 40

Mouth Water (Translated by Lydia Davis); *Phantom Africa (Emawayish)* (Translated by James Clifford); *Mirror of the Bullfight* (Translated by James Clifford); *Fault* (Translated by Lydia Davis) #15 41-48

Nights as Day/Days as Night (Translated by Richard Sieburth); *From* Biffures (Crossouts) (Translated by Lydia Davis); *A Life in Blurbs (la Regle du Jeu)* (Translated by Lydia Davis) #15 51-85

Civilization (1929) (Translated by Lydia Davis); *Jazz* (Interviewed and Translated by Michael Haggerty) #15 93-104

Authenticity; In the Musee de L'Homme; Lasso (all translated by James Clifford); *Fred Astaire* (Translated by Lydia Davis); *Acted Theatre and Lived Theatre in the Zar Cult* (Translated by James Clifford); *Stones for a Possible Alberto Giacometti* (Translated by Lydia Davis); *Envoi* (Translated by James Clifford) #15 106-125

Leonard, George J.:
Squatter's Children #8 184-186

Lessing, Karin:
"stood here. . ."; What it wants; Sea-Foam; September-Wings #1 58-63

Primavera; Terra Cotta Figures, Villa Guilia; Vigil; Shadows, First-comers. . . #3 32-36

Dunes #4 97-101

A Love Poem #7 108-114

In the Aviary of Voices #13 63-65

Under Sirius #21 141-143

Lifson, Martha:
A Still Life; dream/embrace; Her Love Changes It For Me; From the Ironic Marriage Sequence: Dialogue #9 120-123

Lima, José Lezama:
Joyful Night; Fabulous Censures; The Adhering Substance; Fifes, Epifany, Goats; Weight of Flavor; Death of Time; Procession; Tangencies; Ecstasy of the Destroyed Substances; Resistance (all translated by James E. Irby) #3 40-51

Lorenzo, Rafael:
Toy Store; Forensic Geography #9 136-139

Lowell, Douglas:
Desire; For Max #19 41-45

Lyons, Kimberly:
Variations #1 28-32

MacKay, Brent:
Six Days Overdue; Baby Jazz; Fare-The-Well; Angle Iron; Politics #13 86-90

Mackey, Nathaniel:
Sun Poem, by Edward Kamau Brathwaite (Review) #11 200-205

Maclagan, David:
Letter to Peter Watson, by Antonin Artaud (Contranslation) #7 91-99
Henri Michaux (1899-1985) #19 126-128

MacLow, Jackson:
Winds/Instruments #6 4-23
Giant Otters; The Psychological Aspects of the Threat of Nuclear War #10 80-81
Pieces O'Six III; Pieces O'Six VII #12 96-101
Pieces O'Six IX; Pieces O'Six X #13 104-110
Pieces O'Six XXIV #17 4-6
Pieces O'Six XXII #17 105-107
Pieces O'Six XXXII #20 123-128

MacPhee, Medrie:
"The most strong and lasting impression I have of Porfirio. . ." #19 54-55

Mandel, John:
Four Graphite Drawings (Drawings) #5 94-97
Graphite Drawing (Drawing) #5 cover

Mandel, Tom:
Hungry and Waiting; "These stars, they lock together. . ." #20 79-82

Manjarrez, Hector:
From El Golpe Avisa (Translated by Nathaniel Tarn) #2 59-64

Mariani, Paul:
Studiously Unprepared: Notes for Various Talks and Readings: May 1940 to April 1941, by William Carlos Williams (ed) #4 4-35

Marteau, Robert:
Bread and Wine (Translated by Clayton Eshleman and Bernard Bador) #7 40-43

Martin, Taffy:
White Marriage & Recovery, by Amy Gerstler (Review) #13 152-153

Marwan:
Figure with Sheet (Painting); Figure with Veil (Painting); Head with Sheet (Painting); Head (1972 Painting); Head with Veil (Painting); Head (1975 Painting) #6 76-81

Masson, André:
Joueur des des (Portrait de Michel Leiris) (Drawing) #15 92

Mayröcker, Friederike:
Franz Schubert, Or: Notes on the Weather, Vienna (Translated by Rosmarie Waldrop) #20 116-122

McClelland, Bruce:
[Polis] #1 19-20
Petersburg 1982; Swerves #5 54-56
At its Heart is an Adder #16 75-78

McGann, Jerome:
The Weather Book, by Janet Kauffman (Review) #5 152-154
Prose; In Memory of Herzen #7 44-49

McGann, Jerome (continued):
The Loss of Poetry #18 189-195

Response to Charles Bernstein's "The Sophist" #21 191-192

McGarry, Jean:
Poet's Prose: *The Crisis in American Verse,* by Stephen Fredman (Review) #11 205-208

Water Babies (A Little Novel) #12 29-35

The Marvel #16 48-51

Meltzer, David:
Jazz Guitar Notes #21 183-186

Mendieta, Ana:
earth and gunpowder; carved clay-bed (Artworks) #1 96-97

earth and gunpowder (Artwork) #1 cover

Messer, Sam:
Untitled (Drawing); Untitled (Charcoal/Acrylic Paint); After "The Women from 'A'" (Drawing); "Poker Face" (Painting); "For When the Maja Comes" (Painting) #13 67-71

Mészöly, Miklós:
Ode to the Elegy (Cotranslated by Gyula Kodolányi and Clayton Eshleman) #21 63-65

Metcalf, Paul:
Todd Moore: Underbelly of the Heartland #17 135-141

Meyer, Thomas:
The Labyrinth at Crete; Fin de siècle #1 70-73

The Prose of Fact, by Michael Davidson (Review) #1 237-243

Michaux, Henri:
Untitled (Watercolor) #14 cover

Of Language and Writing and the Desire to Turn from Them (Translated by Richard Sieburth) #18 45-55

Michelson, Peter:
Letter in response to Eliot Weinberger's Pound After Torrey and Other Futures #13 161-162

Middleton, Christopher:
Bivouac #15 136-137

Organ #16 166-167

Certain Pleasures #17 29-32

In "The Cedar Door" #17 122-126

Millman, Lawrence:
The Fox-Wife and the Penis of the Lake; Ukuamâq (Translations) #13 59-62

Imarasugssuaq; Meqqoq; Avigiatsiak (Translations) #16 114-116

Miró, Joan:
Letter to Michel Leiris (Translated by Paul Auster) #15 22-24

Mobilio, Albert:
The Earth as Air, by Gustaf Sobin (Review) #12 156-160

Moia, Martha I.:
Some Keys to Alejandra Pizarnik (Translated by Susan Pensak) (Interview) #8 97-101

Molnar, Michael:
Accidia; Obscure Bases of Narration; A Sentimental Elegy; Study of Dimension; "I dread my dreams. . ." all by Arkadii Dragomoshchenko (Cotranslations) #14 116-131

Moraff, Barbara:
Now; Vermont Farming; Going to Sleep; Desire #3 82-86

The World; Imagine: Island; Sukhavati; Bees. . . . . .Honey #14 112-115

Morley, Malcolm:
SS Amsterdam in Front of Rotterdam (Painting); Los Angeles Yellow Pages (Painting); The Last Painting of Vincent Van Gogh; School of Athens XFX P; Day Fishing in Heraklion (Painting) #9 144-148

Morris, Robert:
Fragments from Texts for the Reliefs (1982); Untitled relief (Plaster); Untitled relief (Plaster) #10 103-107

In the Realm of the Carceral—Towers of Silence; In the Realm of the Carceral—Flume and Sluice Gates for the Pools of Persuasion; In the Realm of the Carceral—Observation Yards; In the Realm of the Carceral—the Hot and Cold Pools of Persuasion (Drawings) #13 29-32

Morrow, Bradford:
The Crowley Case: Aprocrypha, by Leonardo Sciascia (Translation) #3 75-81

Nakagawa, Naoto:
An Excerpt from the Memorial Service for Porfirio DiDonna #19 53-54

Nakell, Martin:
Tiresias I:9:B: Great Slave Lake Suite, by Leland Hickman (Review) #1 243-247

The Woe Shirt: Caribbean Folk Tales, by Paulé Bartón (Translated by Howard A. Norman; Drawings by Norman Laliberté) (Review) #3 237-238

The Space of Half an Hour and *The Ruins of Providence,* by Keith Waldrop (Review) #9 195-198

Neher, Ross:
Nature Morte; Burden (Paintings); Light in the Wilderness #41 (Drawing); Light in the Wilderness #40 (Drawing); Light in the Wilderness #48 (Drawing) #18 179-183

Newell, Mike:
Twaddle in a Public Shrine; First Frost; Laum Lions in Early August; Children at Recess are like Ships in Choppy Seas; The Soil around the Root; The Quiet Monopoly All Poets Share #13 72-75

Nicholson, Chuck:
From Corners Series II (Photograph) #2 168

Niedecker, Lorine:
"Knee Deck Her Daisies:" Selections from her Letters to Louis Zukofsky #18 110-151

Nissen, Brian:
Six Constructions (Artwork) #12 112-117

Nissen, Brian (continued):
Pod; Fern; Zempola; Typewriter; Jacuzzi; Coffer (Sculptures) #21 27-32

Norcross, John:
Poem for My Father; Things My Mother Never Had to Tell Me; Ephemeridae #8 94-96

Nutzel, Daniel C.:
On Paul Celan, by Hans Richter (Cotranslation) #11 44-46

O'Brien, Geoffrey:
Tibet #13 80-81

O'Farrell, Fran:
Ritual; In This Time of Quick Identities #10 108-109

Ohst, Carrie:
On Paul Celan, by Hans Richter (Cotranslation) #11 44-46

Olson, Charles:
The Letters of Edward Dahlberg and Charles Olson: The Early Years (1936-1948), edited by Paul Christensen #1 120-168

Charles Olson & Robert Creeley: The Complete Correspondence, edited by George Butterick (Reviewed by Michael Davidson) #1 226-229

The Letters of Edward Dahlberg and Charles Olson: An Unravelling Friendship (1949-1950) edited by Paul Christensen #2 71-166

The Letters of Edward Dahlberg and Charles Olson: The Final Feud (1950-1955), edited by Paul Christensen #3 126-223

The Maximus Poems, edited by George Butterick (Reviewed by Michael Davidson) #9 188-194

From The Collected Poems of Charles Olson: 1940-49, edited by George Butterick #11 141-157

From The Collected Poems of Charles Olson: 1950-57, edited by George Butterick #12 75-95

From The Collected Poems of Charles Olson: 1958-64, edited by George Butterick #13 4-20

O'Neil, Elaine:
Untitled (Photograph) #2 cover

Ortega, Julio:
Toledan Self-Portrait (Translated by Clayton Eshleman) #19 46-49

O'Shaughnessy, Susan:
On Paul Celan, by Hans Richter (Contranslation) #11 44-46

Oviedo, Jose Miguel:
Vallejo: "The Soul that Suffered from Being its Body" #16 138-139

Owens, Rochelle:
A Sandworm Emerging #6 73-75

Padgett, Ron:
Before #2 214-217

Padgett, Ron (continued):

Goethe; The Way of all Handwriting; The Little Past Midnight Snack; Who and Each #13 91-93

Wisconsin #20 115

Palmer, Michael:

Echo #1 170-181

Shadow Train, by John Ashbery (Review) #4 156-159

The Theory of the Flower; Lies of the Poem #5 67-72

Book of the Yellow Castle; Sign #8 153-156

MINE: the one that enters the stories, by Clark Coolidge (Review) #8 208-210

First Figure; Music Rewritten #10 121-123

The Roots of Treason: Ezra Pound and the Secret of Saint Elizabeths, by E. Fuller Torrey (Review) #10 159-161

"You say. . ."; "She says, Into the dark—"; "She says, You are the negative—"; "At the table we say. . ." #15 126-129

The Rightness to be Depicted (Coauthor) #18 23-41

Response to Birkerts #19 153-154

Sun #20 4-22

Paschke, Ed:

Untitled (Painting) #12 cover

Pasternak, Boris:

Summer; Postscript (both translated by Mark Rudman) #4 54-56

Paz, Octavio:

Maithuna (Translated by Eliot Weinberger) #7 4-8

Hermit with Stick (Translated by Eliot Weinberger) #8 166-168

A Fable of Joan Miró (Translated by Eliot Weinberger) #17 7-9

I Speak of the City (Translated by Eliot Weinberger) #20 75-78

Penberthy, Jenny:

The Full Note: Lorine Niedecker, edited by Peter Dent (Review) #12 150-152

Pensak, Susan:

Some Keys to Alejandra Pizarnik, by Martha I. Moia (Interview) (Translation) #8 97-101

Sorceries; The Hidden Ones; The Truth of the Forest; Tragedy; The Desire of the Word; The Word of the Desire; Fundamental Stone, all by Alejandra Pizarnik (Translations) #8 102-108

From About the Bloody Countess, by Alejandra Pizarnik (Translation) #10 53-59

Perelman, Bob:

War & Peace #7 20-26

Word Stimuli; Let's Say; Person #15 138-141

Face Value #18 74-80

Peret, Benjamin:

The Square of the Hypotenuse; I; A H; Nebula (all translated by Rachel Stella and John Yau) #13 76-79

Perez-Roman, Jorge:

Quid Novi? #14 65-67

Six Epifanies Under the Southern Cross (Artwork); Le Grand Ecart (Artwork); Interferences (Artwork); Amereida 65 (Painting); Early Warning (Artwork); A Southern Tropism (Drawing) #14 68-73

Perloff, Marjorie:

The Dice Cup: Selected Prose Poems, by Max Jacob (Edited by Michael Brownstein) (Review) #6 172-179

Some Thoughts on Conferencing #9 172-177

The Case of Amy Clampitt: A Reading of Imago #10 169-178

"Dirty" Language and Scramble Systems #11 178-183

Poetry and the Common Life #12 160-164

Alternate Feminisms #14 132-140

Of Canons and Contemporaries #16 155-162

Howl *and its Enemies: The Genteel Reaction* #20 132-141

Peters, Robert:

When They Have Senses, by Rosmarie Waldrop (Review) #2 251-256

The Dollmaker's Ghost, by Larry Levis; *In Winter,* by Michael Ryan; *Leaving Taos,* by Robert Peterson; *So This is the Map,* by Reg Saner; *Gumbo,* by George Barlow (Reviews) #3 246-253

The Principle of Fit, by David Antin (Review) #5 161-164

From The Blood Countess #10 68-74

Axe Handles, by Gary Snyder (Review) #10 179-184

Paul Christensen. Weights and Measures: Selected Poems (Review) #17 142-144

Petlin, Irving:

Essau; The Two Josephs; The Daughters of Lot; "This is the Place"; The Stolen Blessing 1; Descent (Pastels) #4 111-116

Portrait Study for The Tidal Man (Pastel) #4 cover

Le Depart; New Stone Ring; Birth Tide; Where Damen Ends/1977-81; Abraham's Wagon. . .(Cortez); The Farmer Ron Agnew (Paintings) #18 17-22

The Rightness to be Depicted (Coauthor) #18 23-41

Song for Sarah. . .Puzzle (Pastel) #20 cover

Phillips, Dennis:

Wind Chrysalid's Rattle, by Gustaf Sobin (Review) #1 232-236

From Two Cross #2 188-190

Self-Portrait; Dream of Ocean with Doors #5 89-93

Three-Part Requiem #8 92-93

Phillips, James:

Orpheus, by Johannes Poethen (Translation) #11 100-102

Picasso, Pablo:

Portrait de Michel Leiris II (Drawing) #15 90

Piombino, Nick:
The Pyramids; "An angel fell under a shadow of conceptions. . ."; My Lady Carries Stones #17 37-38

Piper, Paul:
At an Outdoor Cafe; Dedoubler 1; Sorrow; Metaphor; Meditation #17 102-104

Pizarnik, Alejandra:
Sorceries; The Hidden Ones; The Truth of the Forest; Tragedy; The Desire of the Word; The Word of the Desire; Fundamental Stone (all translated by Susan Pensak) #8 102-108

From About the Bloody Countess (Translated by Susan Pensak) #10 53-59

Plante, David:
Paris, 1983 #9 102-110

Poethen, Johannes:
Orpheus (Translated by James Phillips) #11 100-102

Polàckovà, Káca:
Killing Rabbits, by Miroslav Válek (Translation) #5 124-125

Pospoy, Jacinto Cua:
Thirty Years Later: The Estados Unidos Goes to the Moon (Translated by Martin Prechtel and Nathaniel Tarn) #1 21-27

Pound, Ezra:
From an Unpublished Draft of Canto LXXXIV #1 4, 6-10

Prado, Holly:
Sky #3 92-93

Prechtel, Martin:
Thirty Years Later: The Estados Unidos Goes to the Moon, by Jacinto Cua Pospoy (Cotranslation) #1 21-27

Radnóti, Miklós:
Anxiously Autumn Arrives; The Angel of Dread; Seventh Eclogue; Root; Serbian Postcard 1; Forced March (all translated by Gyula Kodolányi and Clayton Eshleman) #21 56-62

Rakosi, Carl:
Punk Rock #5 98-99

Modules #13 42-43

Rasula, Jed:
"difficult to pour the months. . ."; "man's heart. . ."; "mind the Radius of the Thousand Measures. . ."; Kirke #1 199-203

Notes for Echo Lake, by Michael Palmer (Review) #2 233-236

1-10, by Barrett Watten; *Selected Poems: Beyond Even Faithful Legends*, by Bill Bisset; *My Poetry*, by David Bromige; *Themes and Variations*, by John Cage (Reviews) #3 232-234

From The Field & Garden of Circe #4 102-109

Agon, by Harold Bloom (Review) #5 145

Rasula, Jed (continued):
A Night with Hamlet, by Vladimir Holan (Translated by Jarmila & Ian Milner) (Review) #5 146-148
Guide to the Underworld, by Gunnar Ekelöf (Translated by Rika Lesser) (Review) #5 149-150
Spiritual Exercises, by Robert Kelly (Review) #6 171-172
A Renaissance of Women Writers (Review) #7 160-172
Part of Nature, Part of—"Us"? by Helen Vendler (Review) #9 149-159
Book Review Index 1967-1981 (Excerpts) #9 159-167
Parts and Other Parts, by Charles Stein (Review) #9 198-200
On Sulfur's "Notes, Correspondence, Reviews" #9 209-210
Poems, by J.H. Prynne (Review) #10 165-168
Paul Celan #11 82-84
The Tent of Times #12 58-61
The Style of Old Age #12 127-132
Towards Rilke in English #13 33-41
Notes on Recent Publications #15 160-162
The Man Named East and Other Poems, by Peter Redgrove (Review) #15 184-191
Clark Coolidge, Solution Passage, Poems 1978-1981 (Review) #17 115-122
Selected Poems, by Robert Bly (Review) #19 128-134
Response to Birkerts #19 154-156
The Catastrophe of Charm #20 169-176
Sounds from the Mask (Review) #21 174-182
"The Soul is an Onslaught" (Review) #21 210-211

Rattray, David:
A red-framed print of the Summer Palace #3 56
Summer, by Friedrich Hölderlin (Translation) #6 111
From Framgentations; *From* Lettres, by Antonin Artaud (Translations) #9 17-37

Redgrove, Peter:
In the Pharmacy; Escapology; Dream of a Lawn Pillow; Essay; A City of Churches; Resort; She Makes it All Up; A Touch of Drowsiness with Eyes Open; Export #5 77-88
Notes on "Lévi-Strauss and the Dragon," by Chris Knight (Coreview) #8 164-166
Fly Buddha; The Funeral; Some Music; The Impossibility, The No-Body; Childhood Thoughts; Nan's Last Seance #9 67-75
The First Mudlark; The Big Store; The Goging Stool (Mudlark VI); Mudlark X; Mudlark #15 130-135

Reed, David:
"In my address book, above Porfirio's address. . ." #19 59

Register, John:
From An Interview with Jeffrey Browning #16 108-109

Register, John (continued):
Station; Waiting Room for the Beyond; Curtain in the Wind; View of Palm (Paintings) #16 110-113
Red Booths (Painting) #16 cover
Reinfeld, Linda:
Foundations #19 40
In Search of the Primitive: Rereading David Antin, Jerome Rothenberg, and Gary Snyder; In Love with the Gratuitous: Rereading Armand Schwerner, both by Sherman Paul (Reviews) #19 169-173
Reinfrank, Arno:
Lament for Paul Celan (Translated by Suzanne Shipley Toliver) #11 95
Reisch, Steve:
Photographs of scenes from John Cassavetes' "Three Plays of Love and Hate" #7 100-107
John Cassavetes (Photograph) #7 cover
Richter, Hans:
On Paul Celan (Translated by Donald Hamilton, Daniel C. Nutzel, Carrie Ohst, and Susan O'Shaughnessy) #11 44-46
Robbins, Andrew:
Christmas 1978; Ibidem; A Hieroglyph for Joe and Mark and Angela #3 107-112
Rodefer, Stephen:
Four Lectures (Reviewed by George Butterick) #8 198-202
Imitation W #10 82-83
Flowering #12 48-49
Anemic Cinema #16 52-53
Rodgers, Rebecca S.:
Paul Celan, by Milo Dor (Cotranslation) #11 32-35
Celan, by Götz Wienold (Cotranslation) #11 53-60
Rodney, Janet:
Lost in Thought #9 82-87
Rothenberg, Jerome
Hunger #1 11-14
Harold Bloom: The Critic as Exterminating Angel #2 4-26
Terror #2 173-176
War; Europe #3 94-99
Pre-Faces *& Other Writings and* "Vienna Blood" *& other poems* (Reviewed by George Butterick) #4 150-156
The Covering Cherub & The Academy of Dada #5 113-116
Yaqui 1982 #6 33-38
Note on Kurt Schwitters & Raoul Hausmann #6 63
Pre-Face to Symposium of the Whole #6 151-157
Keeping it Old: A Review of the New New American Poetry (Review) #6 181-190
Setchin the Singer; An Ikon #8 124-130

Rothenberg, Jerome (continued):

Blood River Shaman Chant	#10	75-76
Dreamwork One; Dreamwork Two; Dreamwork Three	#12	106-111
Visions of Jesus	#14	22-24
New Chronotopes for Old: Some Notes for James Clifford	#14	143-148
The Nature Theater of Oklahoma	#16	103-107
First Gematria	#18	186-188
Poland/1987	#21	33-43

Rudman, Mark:

Summer; Postscript, both by Boris Pasternak (Translation)	#4	54-56

Sanders, Ed:

Sappho on East Seventh	#8	8-38

Schelling, Andrew:

RASA or Knowledge of the Self, by René Daumal (Translated by Louise Landes Levi) (Review)	#9	206-209
How the Grinch Imitated Gary Snyder	#13	157-161
Seven Nights, by Jorge Luis Borges (Translated by Eliot Weinberger) (Review)	#14	155-158
Works on Paper/Essays, by Eliot Weinberger (Review)	#19	164-167
On Whether or Not to Believe in Your Mind, by Norman Fischer (Review)	#21	207-210

Schmidt, Paul:

"Wind whose. . ."; "Bow! Wow! Bow! . . ."; "P pay o P—. . ."; "Crawling crying craven. . ."; "The law of the see-saw argues. . ."; Bakunin Baking in Baku (Excerpt); *"LAFFERS LOVE LAFFING. . ."; "People say a poem must be understandable. . .,"* all by Velimir Khlebnikov (Translations)	#7	115-120

Schoenfeld, Diana:

Rhythmic Arrangement: Leaf with Stamen (Photograph)	#2	172

Schwabsky, Barry:

New & Selected Poems, by Tony Towle (Review)	#12	147-149

Schwitters, Kurt:

Present Inter Noumenal (Coauthor)	#6	50-51
London Onion	#6	59-62

Sciascia, Leonardo:

The Crowley Case: Aprocrypha (Translated by Braford Morrow)	#3	75-81

Secunda, Arthur:

A Clear Space (Collage)	#3	cover

Segalen, Victor:

Allegories of the Gaze (Translated by James Clifford)	#9	183-186

Shakely, Lauren:

Paw-Paw Bay; Virginia Garden Week; Definition; The Nile of Principles; Needs	#5	62-66

Shakely, Lauren (continued):
May 3, 1984; First Light; With A View; Mother's Method; From the Train #13 114-116

Shapiro, David:
Valediction Capricen #4 39-45

Roman Jakobson (Interview) #12 165-171

Sherry, Lee:
"The paintings, drawings and water colors of Porfirio DiDonna. . ." #19 59-60

Shreve, Dick:
Jimmy Rowles (Review) #3 243-245

Shurin, Aaron:
From Multiple Heart #7 140-142

Shuttle, Penelope:
Childless; The Pretty Worm; The Child Stealer; Locale #5 104-108

Notes on "Lévi-Strauss and the Dragon," by Chris Knight (Co-Review) #8 164-166

Sieburth, Richard:
Nights as Day/Days as Night, by Michel Leiris (Translation) #15 51-68

Of Language and Writing and the Desire to Turn from Them, by Henri Michaux (Translation) #18 45-55

The Guest: Second Thoughts on Translating Hölderlin #21 168-174

Silliman, Ron:
Skies #3 6-8

Skies II #4 138-149

Little Books/Indians and *Nijole's House,* by Hannah Weiner (Review) #5 138-141

The Egyptian Poems, by Beverly Dahlen (Review) #11 184-185

From Oz #16 124-129

Silverman, Herschel:
A Letter to the Editor #4 173

Simic, Charles:
Collard Greens and Black-Eye Peas; My Father's Dream; The Big Machine #19 8-10

Smith, Annette:
Batouque, by Aimé Césaire (Cotranslation) #1 212-218

Visitation; Debris; Tom-Tom II; The Oubliettes of the Sea and the Deluge; Tangible Disaster; Redemption; Your Hair; Noon Knives; Lost Body; . . .But There is This Hurt; Corpse of a Frenzy; I Perseus Centuplicating Myself; Tomb of Paul Eluard, all by Aimé Césaire (Co-translations) #5 33-49

Modernism and Negritude. The Poetry and Poetics of Aimé Césaire, by A. James Arnold (Review) #5 142-145

Smith, David R.:
Cap of Darkness, by Diane Wakoski (Review) #1 247-254

Vingt poètes américains (Review) #2 265-268

Smith, Lawrence:		
Roman Poems: Pier Paolo Pasolini (Translated by Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Francesca Valenti) (Review)	#17	126-129
Snyder, Gary:		
Fear Not; Hers; Uluru Wild Fig Song	#7	63-67
Walking in the New York Bedrock Alive in the Sea of Information	#20	55-59
Sobin, Gustaf:		
Sudden Essays on Shadows and Substance	#1	15-18
Ray	#5	57-61
A Portrait of the Self as Instrument of its Syllables	#14	45-64
Spero, Nancy:		
Codex Artaud (Collage excerpts)	#9	60-66
El Salvador (Artwork)	#14	insert
From the "Torture of Women" series (Artwork)	#19	26-31
Spicer, Jack:		
Letters to Allen Joyce	#10	140-153
Spignesi, Angelyn:		
Daimon Ice Woman w/Bitch	#7	125-139
Starn Twins:		
Stretched Christ; Double Stark Portrait in Swirl; Horses I.C.A. Edition (Artworks)	#19	88-90
Stein, Charles:		
From A Book of Confusions	#1	51-55
The Lions	#5	126-137
Stella, Rachel:		
The Square of the Hypotenuse; I; A H; Nebula, all by Benjamin Peret (Cotranslations)	#13	76-79
The Poet Assassinated and Other Stories, by Guillaume Apollinaire (Translated by Ron Padgett) (Review)	#13	136-137
Stone, Lawre:		
Untitled; Untitled; Untitled; Untitled; (Drawings)	#21	107-110
Strauss, David Levi:		
The Graces, by Aaron Shurin (Review)	#11	188-192
Subin, Nina:		
A note on the photographs	#8	58
Untitled (Photographs)	#8	59-65
Untitled (Photograph)	#8	cover
Szöcs, Géza:		
Commentary on an Old Review (Translated by Enikö Bollobás and Clayton Eshleman)	#21	96-100
Taggart, John:		
Wild Blue Phlox	#4	110

Taggart, John (continued):
Not Raw Enough #6 130-132

For Jerry Lee Lewis #13 135

In Itself; Speeded Up Played Faster #19 24-25

Tarn, Nathaniel:
Thirty Years Later: The Estados Unidos Goes to the Moon, by Jacinto Cua Pospoy (Cotranslation) #1 21-27

From El Golpe Avisa, by Hector Manjarrez (Translation) #2 59-64

Three Months in Which to Live; Opening Out a Line at Mandelstam's; Energetically Singing Against Voracious Earth; And Even the Republic Must Have an End; The Tree of Another World #4 133-137

Dog Viewing Deer: Songs of Death, Resurrection and the Movie Market #8 86-91

Neruda and Indigenous Culture #15 169-173

Tejada, Robert:
A Delta for D.H.L. #20 83-84

Eroding Witness, by Nathaniel Mackey (Review) #20 177-183

Thévenin, Paule:
A Note on the Reproductions from Artaud's Notebooks #9 4

Thorne-Thomsen, Ruth:
From Expeditions (Photograph) #2 167

Tiffany, Daniel:
Madame Edwarda, by Georges Bataille (Translation) #19 113-123

Toliver, Carl Clifton:
In Memoriam Paul Celan, by Rose Ausländer (Translation) #11 91

Paul Celan, by Hans-Jürgen Heise (Translation) #11 94

Paul Celan, by Annemarie Zomack (Translation) #11 96

Toliver, Suzanne Shipley:
Paul Celan's Atemwende: *About the "Death of Speech" and the "Hope of Silence,"* by Richard Exner (Translation) #11 71-81

Jewish Cemetery in Prague, by Erich Arendt (Translation) #11 89-90

Oradea, by Heinz Czechowski; *Lament for Paul Celan*, by Arno Reinfrank (Translations) #11 92-95

True, David:
Fever; Cut and Turn; Reconciliation; Japanese Sea (Paintings) #8 120-123

Untitled (Painting) #11 cover

"Porfirio DiDonna was as pure a painter. . ." #19 56-57

Tschernisch, Garth:
More Praise from the Barnyard Suite No. 2 #2 177-179

Turnbull, Gael:
Sixty-One Entries from a Book of Interesting Things #8 147-152

Twombly, Cy:
Untitled (Anabasis 6) (Artwork) #13 cover

Válek, Miroslav:
Killing Rabbits (Translated by Káca Polàcková) #5 124-125

Vallejo, César:
From the Notebooks (1929-1937) (Translated by Sandra Ferdman) #18 4-16

van Dalen, Anton:
Untitled (Drawings) #10 48-52

Untitled (Drawing) #10 cover

Notes of a Telephone Conversation with Porfirio's Mother, Saturday, 24 January 87 #19 52

VanderMolen, Robert:
Farm House; Up North; From Here to There #20 111-114

Venuti, Lawrence:
With Broken Oars They Embark; Stones in the Warm Mud; Telegram; Born on the Earth; The Killing; Starting Over: An Autobiographical Note; The Absentees, all by Milo De Angeli (Translations) #18 152-157

von Freytag-Loringhoven, Baroness Elsa:
A Dozen Cocktails—Please; Skin of Faith; History. Dim.; Jigg; Sunsong; Fluency; "Whatever you think about jesus christ. . ."; In the Midst—; Ultramundanity; Enchantment; Game (Legend) #6 133-150

Wakoski, Diane:
Why I Am a Poet Not a Painter #1 195-198

Nigredo: Selected Poems 1970-1980, by Norman Weinstein (Review) #6 168-171

The Ring of Irony; For the Girl with Her Face in a Rose; Joyce Carol Oates Plays the Saturn Piano #7 27-35

My Life, by Lyn Hejinian (Review) #8 205-208

What Would Tennessee Williams Have Said; A Snowy Winter in East Lansing #16 86-90

Emerald Ice #19 76-77

Waldrop, Keith:
Elegy #2 218-230

Well Water; Groundless; The Pact of Spring, all by Edmond Jabès (Translations) #8 79-85

Waldrop, Rosmarie:
Figures of the Eye #6 29-31

The Book Belongs to the Reader, by Edmond Jabès (Translation) #8 73-78

Franz Schubert, Or: Notes on the Weather, Vienna, by Friederike Mayröcker (Translation) #20 116-122

Ward, Diane:
The Fourth of July is Geography #9 76-81

Washburn, Katharine:
"BLUE OF THE LODES in your mouth. . ."; "ONCE, when death was

Washburn, Katharine (continued):
mobbed. . ."; *"GONE INTO THE NIGHT, complicit. . .,"* all by Paul Celan (Translations) #11 16

Washington, Timothy:
Introductory Title and Induction and Suspicion (Mixed Media) #7 50-51

Wasserman, Rosanne:
Inuit and Seal; Dark Furniture; Interview with Elpenor; Buskins and Robins #20 60-66

Watkins, Alison:
"Esperanto is the name. . ."; Mantic Core; "In her dream. . ."; Demonstration of a Need; The Tugboat Captain #3 26-31

Watson, Craig:
Under the Bridge, by Carla Harryman (Review) #3 234-235

Controlling Interests; The Occurrence of Tune; Stigma, all by Charles Bernstein (Review) #5 157-161

Considering How Exaggerated Music Is, by Leslie Scalapino (Review) #7 181-183

Watten, Barrett:
Letter to Don Byrd #9 168-170

Progress (Excerpt) #10 39-45

Poetry and Politics (Interviewed by George Hartley) #21 196-207

Weeks, Laurie:
Seahorse #14 25-26

Weinberger, Eliot:
Sunrise, by Frederick Seidel (Review) #1 221-225

Falkland Road, by Mary Ellen Mark (Review) #2 236-242

The Fountain, by San Juan de la Cruz (Translation) #3 87-91

Asamblea de poetas jóvenes de México, edited by Gabriel Zaid (Review) #3 242-243

Peace on Earth, by John Taggart (Review) #4 162-173

Kenneth Rexroth 1905-1982 #5 4-6

The Country Between Us, by Carolyn Forché (Review) #6 158-164

Maithuna, by Octavio Paz (Translation) #7 4-8

The Bomb #8 157-162

Hermit with Stick, by Octavio Paz (Translation) #8 166-168

A Case of AIDS Hysteria #9 170-172

Pound After Torrey & Other Futures #11 158-168

The Dream of India #12 118-126

Kampuchea #13 51-58

Letter in response to responses on Pound After Torrey & Other Futures #13 165-169

Paper Tigers #14 94-104

From This Condensery: The Complete Writings of Lorine Niedecker, edited by Robert Bertholf; *The Granite Pail: The Selected Poems of Lorine Niedecker,* edited by Cid Corman (Reviews) #16 148-154

Weinberger, Eliot (continued):
A Few Don'ts for Chinese Poets #16 167-171
A Fable of Joan Miró, by Octavio Paz (Translation) #17 7-9
What Were the Questions? #17 92-101
Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) #17 108-110
Response to Birkerts #19 148-150
I Speak of the City, by Octavio Paz (Translation) #20 75-78
James Jesus Angleton 1917-1987 #20 142-145
A Note on Montemora, America & the World #20 195-197
Lost Wax / Found Objects: Brian Nissen's Bronze Relics #21 17-26

Weinfeld, Henry:
Life Supports, by William Bronk (Review) #3 238-242

Weinstein, Norman:
Three Penny Lane, by Fielding Dawson; *Selected Poems 1958-1980*, by Gilbert Sorrentino (Reviews) #5 164-168
The Invention of Solitude, by Paul Auster (Review) #8 195-197
Three Rastafarian Poets (Linton Kwesi Johnson, Michael Smith, & Oku Onuora) (Review) #8 203-205
Reading Roger Bastide: Seeking a Poetics of Cultural Interpenetration #16 162-166

Welish, Marjorie:
The Specter of Art Hype and The Ghost of Yves Klein #12 23-28
The Lute Player; Carpet within the Figure #18 42-44
Publicly Silent; Two Lines from Redon; Blood or Color #21 111-113

Wesling, Donald:
Pacific Plainsong I-XIII, by Peter Michelson; *My Pleasure*, by Laura Chester (Reviews) #1 230-232
Staves Calends Legends, by Thomas Meyer (Review) #2 256-257

Wheeler, Susan:
What Memory Reveals; The Man with the Green Card #19 91-93

White, Randy:
"between not speech. . ."; "in sight. . ."; "in a ring of stone. . ."; "o moon head. . ." #7 36-39

Wienold, Götz:
Celan (Translated by Joachim Herrmann and Rebecca S. Rodgers) #11 53-60

Williams, C.K.:
Will; USOCA; The Modern; End of Drought #17 89-91

Williams, Jonathan:
In Marsden Hartley's Hand #1 193-194

Williams, William Carlos:
Studiously Unprepared: Notes for Various Talks and Readings: May 1940 to April 1941, edited by Paul Mariani #4 4-35
Sketch for a Primer of Present Day Poetic Practice #7 151-156

Williamson, Alan:
Art Roman #1 219-220

Collected Poems 1947-1980, by Allen Ginsberg (Review) #14 159-166

Wilson, Bill:
Kokoschka's Water; Tomato Soup; The Green Room #7 121-124

To Deplane; Chosen; Crawler; Crib in the Rock; Tooth of Blond; The Ball; Poem #16 26-32

Wolff, Daniel:
Déyé Mön, Gin Mön/Behind the mountains, there are more mountains #19 157-161

Worley, Jeff:
Paul Celan, by Hans-Jürgen Heise (Cotranslation) #11 36-43

Worley, Linda Kraus:
Paul Celan, by Hans-Jürgen Heise (Cotranslation) #11 36-43

Yank, Terry:
Untitled (Photographs) #20 67-72

Yau, John:
Corpse and Mirror; Corpse and Mirror II; Corpse and Mirror III #4 126-132

Carp and Goldfish #7 143-145

Speculative Images: The Paintings of David True #8 114-119

Malcolm Morley's Education #9 140-143

The View from 166 Avenue A: The Drawings of Anton van Dalen #10 46-47

A Brief Note on Robert Morris and His Fragments from Texts for the Reliefs #10 102

Cenotaph; Halfway to China #10 132-135

The Drawings of Porfirio DiDonna #11 103-105

Robert Morris's In the Realm of the Carceral #13 28

Sam Messer #13 66

The Square of the Hypotenuse; I; A H; Nebula, all by Benjamin Peret (Cotranslations) #13 76-79

Howard Buchwald #13 94-95

Michael Kessler's Drawings: Gesture as Image #14 88

Alan Cote: The Role of Drawing #15 142

Leon Golub: Existentialist/Activist Painter, by Donald Kuspit (Review) #15 162-164

Why Duchamp: An Essay on Aesthetic Impact, by Gianfranco Baruchello and Henry Martin (Review) #15 174-175

All This Changing Trouble Luck and Suddenness; Seance Music; Dragon's Blood (1-4) #17 39-42

In the Visionary Tradition: The Art of Paul Laffoley #17 84-88

Light and Dark—The Art of Ross Neher #18 184-185

Yau, John (continued):
Ghengis Chan, Private Eye; The Case; Choral Amphisbaena #19 4-7
Remembering Porfirio #19 60-63
The Photographs of Terry Yank: An Introduction #20 73-74
The Drawings of Lydia Dona and Lawre Stone #21 101-102
Young, Geoffrey:
Life Size #8 55-57
Elegy #12 36-41
Young Bear, Ray A.:
Nothing Could Take Away the Bear-King's Image #10 115-120
Yurkievich, Saul:
I Myself; "They force me to play. . ."; Sentence; Edifice Dedicated to Silence (all translated by Cola Franzen) #14 106-109

Zachary, R.Y.:
Hart Crane to Kenneth Burke: Ten Unpublished Letters (ed) #2 201-213
Zavatsky, Bill:
Ranger (Volume I) and Ranger (Volume II), by Theodore Enslin; *Yellow Lola: Formerly Titled Japanese Neon (Hello La Jolla, Book II)*, by Ed Dorn; *Horse Sacrifice*, by Charles Stein (Reviews) #2 261-265
Ziolkowski, Thad:
Rules; Inside the Wind #20 85
Zomack, Annemarie:
Paul Celan (Translated by Carl Clifton Toliver) #11 96

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Jerome Rothenberg from *Khurban* Bob Perelman from *Captive Audience*
Gustaf Sobin from *Voyaging Portraits* Rachel Blau DuPlessis *Draft #6: Midrush*
Gerald Burns *Socrates Dying in Widener* Jed Rasula *New Rev. on Cell. Path. Porn.*
Claude Royet-Journoud *A Descriptive Method* translated by Michael Davidson
Joseph Simas from *That Other Double In Person* Marc Nasdor *Treni in Partenza*
Stephen Ratcliffe *spaces in the light said to be where one/ Comes from*
Peter Middleton *Portrait of an Unknown Man* Barbara Roether *The Formulations*
Rae Armantrout *Language of Love & other poems* Duncan McNaughton from *The Pilot*
Norman Fischer *Working Title & other poems* David Chaloner *Tongues of Light*
Paul Christensen *A Noble Wave: On Gustaf Sobin*
George Hartley *Sophist & Sentence: Bernstein & Silliman*
Bruce Campbell *Four Poets: Gansz, Coolidge, Andrews, Bernstein*
John Shoptaw *Saving Appearances: On John Ashbery*

ISSUE NUMBER SIX:

Susan Howe: *Thorow*
David C.D. Gansz: *Sin Tactics*
Barbara Guest: *The Screen of Distance*
Clark Coolidge: 20 poems from *Literal Landscapes*
Denis Mahoney: 3 sections from *Black Pig* Ronald Johnson: *The Fireworks Spires*
Keith Waldrop: from *Transcendental Studies* Fanny Howe: *Torn Parts: A Novel*
Dennis Phillips: 7 pieces from *A World* Mei-mei Berssenbrugge: *Recitatif*
Six Writers on Eshleman:
Paul Christensen • Rachel Blau DuPlessis • Jed Rasula
Gerald Burns • James Hillman • Karin Lessing
Clayton Eshleman: *Golub The Axolotl*
Georges Bataille: *Guilty* translated by Bruce Boone
Bob Perelman: 5 poems from *Face Value*
Bruce Andrews: *Be Careful Now & other texts*
Diane Ward: 4 poems from *Concept Lyrics* Marjorie Perloff: *On Steve McCaffery*
Michael Blitz: *On Jed Rasula* George Hartley: *On "In the American Tree"*
Linda Reinfeld: *On Susan Howe* Stephen Ratcliffe: *Two Hejinian Talks*
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